Shared superintendency in Iowa: An investigation of organizational perceptions of leaders in districts that employ a shared superintendent

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SHARED SUPERINTENDENCY IN IOWA: AN INVESTIGATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERS IN DISTRICTS THAT EMPLOY A SHARED SUPERINTENDENT

A Dissertation
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
Approved

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Dr. Steven Corbin, Committee Member

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May, 2011
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with the deepest gratitude that I first acknowledge and thank Robert Decker for his unique combination of patience and persistence that helped bring this study to a successful conclusion. It has been my highest honor in my educational experiences to further his research, begun over twenty years ago, on this topic of shared superintendents. I extend that gratitude to the rest of my dissertation committee members Steve Corbin, Dave Else, Dewitt Jones, and Nick Pace who each, in his own special way, provided the perspective, depth, encouragement, and firmness of purpose to help me at those times when I needed it most.

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To all who were willing to give of their time and expertise to be interviewed for this work, I am incredibly grateful for your willingness to risk giving me your thoughts and opinions. I have made every attempt to represent your comments with the greatest of accuracy and feel strongly that many district leaders, and residually students, will benefit from this work as a result of your courage.

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SHARED SUPERINTENDENCY IN IOWA AN INVESTIGATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERS IN DISTRICTS THAT EMPLOY A SHARED SUPERINTENDENT

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

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Approved

Dr Robert Decker, Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

The combination of declining enrollment and diminishing resources continues to pressure school leaders to make difficult choices, for an increasing number of districts one answer to this dilemma is to share a superintendent with a neighboring district. Research conducted by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) showed that while potential financial benefits do exist to this type of organizational structure, this decision also comes with some cautionary concerns that must be considered. The purpose of this study was to provide additional information about shared superintendents to school districts that are considering moving to this kind of executive leader format. Specifically, this study focused on how leadership positions in the districts where shared superintendents have been employed are impacted by the structure of a shared executive leader.

The methodology used for this purpose was a case study approach in which the leaders in four districts representing two sharing situations were interviewed. Five research questions framed this study: (1) What are the motives for the decision by districts to share superintendents? (2) Do shared superintendents face similar challenges as their counterparts from 20 years ago? (3) Have the lessons learned from the prior research been heeded over the last two decades? (4) Are there any new challenges facing superintendents today? and (5) What impact on the roles of district leaders, if any, has resulted from the decision to share a superintendent? Data was analyzed using the
Constant Comparative Method as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in their text *Naturalistic Inquiry*

Within the limits of this study, the following conclusions were reached: (1) The impact of a district’s decision to share a superintendent can be positive on the leaders of both districts, (2) The challenges of the past to district leadership in a shared superintendent environment have been addressed, (3) Shared superintendent arrangements can be long lasting when the motivation to share extends beyond the financial, (4) The shared superintendent arrangement does not have to impede the superintendent in his or her role as an instructional leader and can promote work as a manager, (5) A shared superintendent arrangement is recommended for consideration with certain job-specific caveats, and (6) Specific abilities and skills are necessary for the success of a shared superintendent arrangement.
Through the first decade of the 2000 millennium, K-12 public schools in Iowa have been forced to make some difficult choices when deciding how to continue to deliver quality education to their students. These choices have been thrust upon them for a variety of reasons, chief among them are declining enrollment, diminishing resources, and increasing and ever-changing expectations from both state and federal governments. In response to these pressures, school leaders and school boards have examined all possible means of increasing effectiveness while at the same time balancing that effectiveness with increasing efficiency.

Employee costs are typically the largest expense in organizations, so when businesses are facing these kinds of pressures, they often look to reduce entry or middle level staff in a "last in, first out" manner using the logic that the less time an employee has spent in the organization, the less value that employee has to the organization. According to Hamel,

Hierarchies may have gotten flatter, but they haven't disappeared. Frontline employees may be smarter and better trained, but they're still expected to line up obediently behind executive decisions. Lower-level managers are still appointed by more senior managers. Strategy still gets set at the top. And the big calls are still made by people with big titles and even bigger salaries. There may be fewer middle managers on the payroll, but those that remain are doing what managers have always done—setting budgets, assigning tasks, reviewing performance, and cajoling their subordinates to do better (2007).
However, the education system operates from a different mindset. Because some research, such as that done by Pritchard (1999), argues that it is the classroom teacher that has the highest impact on children’s ability to learn, many of those making these difficult decisions have adopted the position that it is educationally sound to look at the leadership structure in the organization for efficiencies, while doing everything possible to maintain the integrity of the connection between the classroom teachers and their students. In addition to being farther removed from direct contact with the students, school leaders are often the most highly paid employees, reducing an administrator therefore will almost always result in increased savings compared to other personnel positions. Therefore, in opposition to the way that most businesses operate, when reductions in personnel need to be made, not only are the leaders of the school under consideration for cuts, they may actually rise quickly to the top of the list.

However, school boards also understand that they cannot function with a total absence of district leadership. School board members are citizens of the district who are willing to volunteer their time and talents to help their local schools. While some may be leaders in their respective professions, very few have any kind of formal training in educational leadership. As a result, they look to the expertise of the district leadership they hire to provide such things as fiscal oversight and recommendations, recruitment and employment of properly trained personnel, facility management and improvement, and all of the other nuances that result in the best educational environment possible for the children of the district.
This subsequently creates a challenge for school districts and the boards that govern them. How do they maintain a high level of leadership service while at the same time reducing costs in leadership personnel?

For some districts, the phenomenon of a shared superintendent is the answer to this dilemma. According to Decker and Talbot (1991), a shared superintendent is employed in some capacity by two or more districts and serves as the educational leader of those districts. As the first decade of the 2000 millennium closed, more and more districts in Iowa turned to the shared superintendent in response to this dilemma. For example, during the 2007-2008 school year, according to documents obtained from the School Administrators of Iowa organization, there were only 14 sharing situations in Iowa representing 28 of Iowa’s 361 districts (8%). By the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, that number had jumped to 20 sharing situations involving 40 districts (11%). During the 2009-2010 school year, 31 sharing situations were being employed involving 63 different districts (17%). Therefore, the number of shared superintendents more than doubled in the state of Iowa in just three years.

**Conceptual Framework**

During the 1988-1989 school year, Dr. Robert Decker and Dr. Adrian Talbot (1991) of the University of Northern Iowa conducted groundbreaking research into the first-hand experiences of superintendents in Iowa who were employed simultaneously by two or more school districts, commonly referred to as “shared superintendents.” These researchers, utilizing a structured interview format, talked with over 95% of the 44 shared
superintendents in Iowa, seeking to record their first-hand experiences and find answers to the following research questions: (1) To what extent, if any, were the motives for public school districts to enter into a sharing arrangement financial? (2) What unique challenges have been identified by superintendents involved in the shared superintendency? and (3) What lessons have been learned for those who may entertain similar arrangements in the future? The results of their study were published in the Summer, 1991 issue of *The Journal of Research in Rural Education* and are still being used by districts facing the decision to share a superintendent to this day.

At the time of the study, the trend in Iowa was toward increasing this practice of sharing superintendents. According to Decker and Talbot (1991), during the 1986-1987 school year, 22 Iowa districts shared a superintendent; in 1987-1988, that number rose to 67; by the fall of 1988, 88 districts were sharing a superintendent. When Decker teamed with McCumsey (1990) during the 1989-1990 school year to follow up the superintendent research with interviews of board presidents of districts that shared superintendents, 102 school districts were sharing their chief administrator.

The research showed that according to board presidents and superintendents, the main reason for entering these agreements at the time was financial. The state of Iowa was offering incentive dollars that made sharing the chief administrator very attractive; these incentives combined with the savings of essentially decreasing by half the cost of the highest salaried position in the district led to the nearly 500% explosion in shared superintendents in that four year period. A secondary reason districts cited for sharing a
superintendent was that they believed that by doing so they could expedite a sharing agreement of students with their neighboring districts.

However, even at the time that they conducted the research, Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) discovered that there were burgeoning problems and issues with these sharing agreements. One main concern expressed by both board presidents and shared superintendents included the excessive work overload that was being placed on these individuals. Doubling the work load while cutting the amount of time to do the work was quickly leading to decreased job satisfaction and “burn out” of even some of the most self-motivated superintendents. In fact, Decker and Talbot concluded that these types of sharing agreements really only work well if two conditions exist: if both districts were truly interested in sharing groups of students sometime in the near future, and if the shared superintendent was a well-respected veteran of at least one of the districts.

Another main concern expressed by board presidents and superintendents was that there was a loss of personal contact and control between the educational leader of the district and its stakeholders that was difficult to overcome. Communities which were used to seeing and communicating with their chief administrator at functions and events now no longer saw that individual nearly as often, and shared superintendents found themselves dealing with a sense of loss of personal control over day to day job responsibilities.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to provide information about shared superintendents to school districts in Iowa and across the nation who, for whatever reasons germane to their respective districts, are considering moving to this kind of executive leader format. It was felt that this research will also be useful to the Iowa Legislature as they consider expanding the timelines of current incentives in Iowa law that support shared superintendents, currently projected to sunset in 2013. Specifically, this study focused on how other leadership positions in the district, such as principals, business managers, board presidents, and other supervisors were affected by the use of a shared executive leader.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study was to research how district leaders, such as the superintendent, board president, business manager, principal(s), and other supervisors view their changing role when a decision is made to share the executive leader with another district.

Operational Definitions

Shared Superintendent  a superintendent who works for two or more independent public school districts, each with its own board of directors with the legal authority to operate the district, develop and set policy, and hire and discharge district personnel.
Consolidation/Reorganization/Merger  when two or more public school districts agree through the means outlined in the Code of Iowa to become one unified, independent school district

Whole Grade Sharing  when two or more public school districts share and transport entire classes or grade units to a cooperating neighboring district for delivery of educational services

District Leaders  when used in this study, this term refers to any of the following individuals or groups within the respective districts  school board presidents, superintendents, principals, business officials, or others who serve in a supervisory capacity

Research Questions

Through a case study format, willing participants were interviewed in person by the researcher in an effort to ascertain answers to the following research questions

1  What are the motives for the decision by districts to share superintendents?
2  Do shared superintendents face similar challenges as their counterparts from 20 years ago?
3  Have the lessons learned from the prior research been heeded over the last two decades?
4  Are there any new challenges facing shared superintendents today?
5 What impact on the roles of district leaders, if any, has resulted from the decision to share a superintendent?

Explanation of the Research Questions

Each of these research questions serve a particular role to the purpose of this study. The answers to Research Question #1, "What are the motives for the decision by districts to share superintendents," helped the researcher determine why districts chose to enter into this agreement in the first place. Districts that are considering sharing a superintendent with another district will be able to review the answers to Research Question #1 and determine if their motivations and situations are similar or different to those of the districts studied. If similar, the answers to the subsequent research questions will be quite helpful in determining if this kind of agreement has a good opportunity to work in their district. Even if their motivations are significantly different, there may still be value in examining the rest of the results of the study, with the caveat that they will be examining data and perceptions based on situations that may not be germane to theirs.

Several interview questions were devised to arrive at the answer to Research Question #1. These included, “What was the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent?” “What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered?” and “What advantages/disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?” The first question clearly goes to motivation behind the decision to share a superintendent. The purpose of the other two questions was to find out whether the arrangement succeeded in meeting the intent.
The answers to some of these questions were also used for information to determine answers to other research questions. This was a theme used throughout the interviews, any time the answer to an interview question could be analyzed and used for results for additional research questions the researcher took full advantage of that opportunity. In fact some interview questions were designed specifically so that answers given could be transferred into results for multiple research questions.

The intent of Research Question #2, “Do shared superintendents face similar challenges as their counterparts from 20 years ago?” was to provide a comparison between the explosion of the number of shared superintendents during the latter part of the decade of the 1980’s and the current sharp trend upward in the number of shared superintendents at the end of this decade. School leaders considering this decision might look at the historical perspective and determine that, since there was a period of substantial growth in the number of shared superintendents twenty years ago, the same reasons and rationale exist for making that decision in the current environment. A goal of the study was to determine whether or not that is true. Answers to this research question may pay an additional benefit in giving districts pause to consider all sides of the issue and understand fully the positive and negative aspects of sharing a superintendent before actually deciding to make this important decision.

A problem faced by the researcher is that the answer to this research question requires a historical perspective that most respondents did not have. Therefore, multiple interview questions were designed to gather the current perspective and the researcher
was responsible for supplementing the historical perspective. Interview questions designed to gather the current perspective included, “What advantages/disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?” “Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?” and “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?” A complete review of the historical perspective is summarized in Chapter 2 “Review of Literature” and is embedded in the discussion of research question #2 in the “Results” Section of this dissertation.

Research Question #3, “Have the lessons learned from the prior research been heeded over the last two decades?” provided a correlation between the results of the most noted prior research on this topic, reported by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey in 1990 and 1991, and this current study. Twenty years ago at the height of the explosion of the number of shared superintendents in Iowa, these researchers provided documentation that showed that there were cautions that needed to be recognized and heeded with these types of agreements. One of the main concerns was the excessive overload that was being placed on the person attempting to perform the task. In some cases the workload was being doubled while the amount of time needed to focus on the work was being halved, creating decreased job satisfaction and eventual “burn out” in even the most motivated individuals. Secondary concerns revolved around the natural loss of relationship-building necessary to be an effective leader, lack of visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position.
One might assume from the sharp decline of the number of shared superintendents following the late 1980's explosion that the research was heeded and districts worked to find other ways to find efficiencies besides sharing their educational leader. But other factors likely played a part, and with this sharing concept currently increasing in popularity again, it was important to study if boards and other school leaders are aware of these precautions and taking them into consideration. The following interview questions were designed to uncover that information: “What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered?” “What advantages/disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?” “Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?” and “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?”

Research Question #4 asked, “Are there any new challenges facing shared superintendents today?” and again called for somewhat of a historical perspective that many respondents might not have. As noted above, it was the responsibility of the researcher to provide this in the study, the bulk of which can be found in Chapter 2 “Review of Literature” as well as embedded throughout the discussion of the study in Chapter 5 “Results.” The importance of the answer to this research question cannot be overstated. It is apparent that economic challenges are forcing educational decision makers to look to the past for an old paradigm that was widely considered and frequently
used to meet those past challenges. But have conditions changed in such a way that a prior solution is not applicable to the present problem? To uncover this, the researcher used the following questions: “What advantages/disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?” “Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?” “Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?”

The final research question for this study was “What impact on the roles of district leaders, if any, has resulted from the decision to share a superintendent?” This was the key question of all of the research questions and is the one highlighted in the title of this study. In considering this topic and in carefully examining the research done two decades ago by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991), the working hypothesis was that research will hold up twenty years later, and if that research was simply duplicated and updated the results would be much the same. To hedge against that the current research was expanded to include the perceptions of others in the organization most directly affected by the decision to share a superintendent. The following interview questions sought to directly gain that information: “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” “What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the respective district leader’s role as the result of the decision to share a superintendent?” “How does the added work load, if any, factor into the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the interviewee?” Without a
careful consideration of these issues and others like them, even under ideal sharing conditions the decision to share a superintendent may be ill-advised

As before, multiple interview questions were designed to broaden this issue of perception. They included, “Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?” “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?”

The sum of the answers to these five research questions, arrived at through the corresponding interview questions, provided a broad perspective on this topic, the results of which are outlined in Chapter 5.

Limitations

This study was limited to four school districts in Iowa which, in pairs, have shared the same superintendent for over a half decade. All of the communities that form part of the school districts in the study are rural, the economy of all four communities is primarily agriculturally based, and the communities are not especially racially or ethnically diverse, which is typical of most small communities in Iowa. Findings are limited to the four districts studied and the perceptions of those interviewed at the time they were interviewed. The validity of the data was further limited to the respondents’ interpretations of interview questions and their willingness to respond honestly.
Methodology

The goal of this research was to provide school leaders with critical information needed if they are in a position to consider or are forced to consider the viability of a shared superintendent. The best way to augment the research that has already been conducted on this topic was to invest an extended time in multiple districts interviewing those who are experiencing this phenomenon through a case study approach. This study was considered interpretive research in which the main source of information was through interviews with superintendents, building leaders, and support staff supervisors. Once all case studies were conducted and concluded, results were summarized in the “results” section of the dissertation.

These interviews used a flavor of the same questions that Decker, Talbot and McCumsey (1990, 1991) used 20 years ago, additional questions germane to each group were asked depending on the tenor of the particular interview. Choice of districts was crucial to the success of this study. The overriding factors when choosing which districts to study were length of time in the sharing agreement combined with length of service of the shared superintendent. It was felt that those two factors indicated a satisfaction with the situation from the point of view of both the district and the shared superintendent. The research was therefore limited to districts that had shared the same superintendent for five years or more.

To gain a broad view of shared superintendent situations respondents of two different sharing situations involving four different school districts agreed to participate.
In accordance with stipulations provided by the University of Northern Iowa’s Institutional Review Board, the superintendents of potential participating districts were given an outline of the study and then asked to respond with a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix C) indicating district willingness to participate in the research. Once that permission was obtained, individual participants who qualified for inclusion in the study were contacted by the researcher and given an outline of the study (Appendix B), those agreeing to participate signed a consent form (Appendix A) prior to responding to interview questions. All potential respondents contacted agreed to participate, all interviews were conducted through completion.

The interviews were held on site at participants’ respective districts labeled “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D” for the purposes of confidentiality. District A serves approximately 650 students and held the original contract of the superintendent when they entered a sharing agreement in 1999. The District they share a superintendent with, District B is contiguous to District A and serves approximately 450 students. These two districts employ a “pure” shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing; the only services they share are the superintendent and a transportation director. The superintendent shared by Districts A and B was beginning his ninth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Because “pure” sharing situations like that utilized by Districts A and B are so rare and, once entered into, seem to last for such a short time, the second superintendent sharing situation studied had some elements of whole grade sharing included at the time.
of the study, District C entered into a sharing arrangement with District D beginning in 2004, at the time of the study they remained two separate districts with distinct boards of education, administrative teams, business managers, and supervisors, but did include some whole grade sharing elements at the middle school level. District C was by far the larger of the two and the largest in the study, serving over 1100 students and including two separate elementary buildings. District C was the original holder of the superintendent contract. As part of the agreement to share the superintendent, District C sends its sixth grade students to District D. District D is by far the smallest of the four districts highlighted in this study with an enrollment of under 200, District D sends its seventh through twelfth grade students to District C. The superintendent shared by Districts C and D was beginning his sixth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Each of these districts was the subject of a case study wherein the researcher asked the shared superintendent, building leaders, board presidents, business managers, and select supervisors in departments such as transportation, custodial, and grounds/building and maintenance a variety of questions the answers of which, when compiled and synthesized, led to answers to the research questions.

Data Analysis

This methodology yielded 23 interviews, which identified a critical need to have a format in place from the onset to categorize and organize the data. Because this was interpretive research, statistical analysis of numbers was not needed. However, many
comparisons needed to be made from the anecdotal information collected in an effort to
arrive at summaries and results that those schools considering sharing their executive
officer might find helpful and meaningful. The ideal method chosen allowed for
continuous and simultaneous collecting and processing of data. According to Lincoln and
Guba (1985) the best method for accomplishing all of these goals was the Constant
Comparative Method as outlined in their text *Naturalistic Inquiry*.

The first step in utilizing this method involved comparing incidents applicable to
each category. For this study, each research question was considered a category.
Therefore, as questions were asked during the interview and responses given, every
response that could be tied directly back to one of the five research questions was coded
to that question. As noted previously, each interview question was designed to coincide
with a particular research question or set of questions. Additionally, since this was
interpretive research and the researcher was consequently allowed to probe interview
answers with follow up questions, further meaningful information was gained, this was
also coded to the applicable research question or questions.

The second stage of the Constant Comparative Method involved integrating
categories and their properties, in other words, a refinement and synthesis of the
information gathered and coded in the first stage occurred. As Lincoln and Guba (1985)
suggested, this was not a distinct and separate action, as the “intuitiveness” of the first
stage morphed into the more exacting nature of the second stage. This stage was marked
by data collection efforts that were directed more specifically at “fleshing out categories,
filling in gaps in the larger taxonomy or category set, clearing up anomalies or conflicts, and extending the range of information that can be accommodated” (p 343)

As with the transition between the first two stages, the transition between stage two and three of the Constant Comparative Method was quite seamless. The third stage is called “Delimiting the Construction” and was marked by noticeably fewer modifications in data collection and processing, as the data collected toward the end became less filled with options and probing and more focused on the emerging results of the research.

Using this Constant Comparison Method allowed for continual filtration and funneling of interview results into meaningful and useful data to summarize for the study.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters, the first of which is entitled “Introduction” and which includes the conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, an analysis of the research questions, an analysis of the interview questions, a synthesis of how each one ties back to at least one research question, a discussion of the limitations of the study, and an overview of the methodology and data analysis used in the study.

Chapter 2 is focused on the review of literature. In Chapter 3 the methodology of the research is outlined. Chapter 4 is entitled “Findings” and focuses on a detailed look at all four case studies as they each pertain to the research on shared superintendents. The final chapter is entitled “Summary, Conclusions, Reflections, and Recommendations for
Future Study” and synthesizes the scope of the study and its results into recommendations for future practice

This dissertation has the potential to give Boards, prospective shared superintendents, and the organizations that will be impacted answers to critical questions before making a decision of tremendous impact to the lives of their children, the choice of an educational leader.
CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

During the 1988-1989 school year, Dr Robert Decker and Dr Adrian Talbot (1991) of the University of Northern Iowa conducted groundbreaking research into the first hand experiences of superintendents in Iowa who were employed simultaneously by two or more school districts, commonly referred to as “shared superintendents.” These researchers, utilizing a structured interview format, talked with over 95% of the 44 shared superintendents in Iowa, seeking to record their first-hand experiences and find answers to the following research questions (1) To what extent, if any, were the motives for public school districts to enter into a sharing arrangement financial? (2) What unique challenges have been identified by superintendents involved in the shared superintendency? and (3) What lessons have been learned for those who may entertain similar arrangements in the future? The results of their study were published in the Summer, 1991 issue of The Journal of Research in Rural Education and are still being used by districts facing the decision to share a superintendent to this day.

At the time of the study, the trend in Iowa was toward increasing this practice of sharing superintendents. According to Decker and Talbot (1991), during the 1986-1987 school year, 22 Iowa districts shared a superintendent, in 1987-1988, that number rose to 67, by the fall of 1988, 88 districts were sharing a superintendent. When Decker teamed with McCumsey (1990) during the 1989-1990 school year to follow up the
superintendent research with interviews of board presidents of districts that shared superintendents, 102 school districts were sharing their chief administrator.

The research showed that according to board presidents and superintendents, the main reason for entering these agreements at the time was financial. The state of Iowa was offering incentive dollars that made sharing the chief administrator very attractive, these incentives combined with the savings of essentially decreasing by half the cost of the highest salaried position in the district led to the nearly 500% explosion in shared superintendents in that four year period. A secondary reason districts cited for sharing a superintendent was that they believed that by doing so they could expedite a sharing agreement of students with their neighboring districts.

However, even at the time that they conducted the research, Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) discovered that there were burgeoning problems and issues with these sharing agreements. One main concern expressed by both board presidents and shared superintendents included the excessive work overload that was being placed on these individuals. Doubling the work load while cutting the amount of time to do the work was quickly leading to decreased job satisfaction and “burn out” of even some of the most self-motivated superintendents. In fact, Decker and Talbot (1991) concluded that these types of sharing agreements really only work well if two conditions exist: if both districts were truly interested in sharing groups of students sometime in the near future, and if the shared superintendent was a well-respected veteran of at least one of the districts.
Another main concern expressed by board presidents and superintendents was that there was a loss of personal contact and control between the educational leader of the district and its stakeholders that was difficult to overcome. Communities which were used to seeing and communicating with their chief administrator at functions and events now no longer saw that individual nearly as often, and shared superintendents found themselves dealing with a sense of loss of personal control over day to day job responsibilities.

As recently as the 2007-2008 school year comparatively few Iowa school districts were choosing to share a superintendent. According to the Iowa Department of Education's 2008 Condition of Education Report (2009), only 28 districts in Iowa were continuing this practice, a drop of 73%. But according to the Iowa Association of School Boards, during the 2008-2009 school year, that number had risen to 40 districts that share superintendents. During the 2009-2010 school year, 31 superintendents were being shared by 63 districts according to information provided by the School Administrators of Iowa. So the trend was increasing at a comparable rate with what happened in the past, even though the total number of shared superintendents in Iowa was less than 50% of what it was 20 years ago.

It would be interesting to know why the decline occurred. Did boards and prospective shared superintendents heed the cautionary advice from Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey's (1990, 1991) research? Has the need and opportunity for a shared superintendent dropped due to a declining number of school districts? Did districts decide
that for any number of reasons the agreements were not in their best interests? All of these questions call for a historical perspective that may be impossible to recover due to the frequent changes in board leadership, which may have occurred as often as once per year, and the reality that very few districts have superintendents that have served their current district for more than five years, much less shared a superintendent for twenty years.

One issue that can be addressed is that of comparison of current financial incentives that exist for these types of agreements and those that were in place twenty years ago. According to Decker and Talbot (1991), the Iowa Department of Education used a formula that allowed each district to claim an additional 15 students up to a maximum of 25 total shared students. Those additional students were then multiplied by the state’s cost per pupil generating enough funding that those districts could share a maximum of about $75,000. As the cost per pupil increased each year, so did the amount generated by this formula.

A similar incentive was reinstated by Iowa law beginning with the 2007-2008 school year. At that time, districts could begin sharing “operational functions” – which included, among other things, superintendents. A formula was again established which included the number of resident students multiplied by the district cost per pupil along with an additional 2%. The law provided for a minimum (10) and maximum (40) numbers of students that can be counted by each district, capping the total maximum incentive at about $240,000 per year. However, funding dropped at 20% per year and
phased out over five years, ending with the 2012-2013 school year, districts were required to also submit an annual report of cost savings or increased cost savings.

Another issue that makes the questions cited above impossible to answer is that there appears to have been surprisingly limited additional research done on the topic of shared superintendency over the last two decades. One study was conducted at about the same time as the Decker study by Bratlie (1992), who interviewed 78 superintendents and 161 board presidents of schools with shared superintendents in Iowa and Minnesota during the 1988-89 school year. Not surprisingly, Bratlie’s results were similar to those of Decker and McCumsey (1990). Financial savings was the primary reason for sharing a superintendent and cited as the most frequent advantage, and school board members were the strongest supporters of the arrangement, while community members and staff posed the strongest opposition. Bratlie reported that availability of people willing to take on a shared position and superintendent burnout were the most frequent disadvantages.

During the same era Meyer (1990) set out to determine the similarities and differences that exist in perceptions about the shared superintendency among shared superintendents and the presidents of the school boards that they serve. His study showed that there was some agreement in the perceptions of both groups. There were no significant differences in the responses by shared superintendents and board presidents to statements such as “board and community expectations are less than those for a non-shared superintendent, it is far better if board policies and master contracts are similar, up-to-date information about the instruction program is regularly made available to all...
schools, the superintendent is looked upon as the key figure in the organizational
structure of the system, and compatibility and strong similarities among communities are
not necessary for success of the shared superintendent

However, Meyer (1990) found that there were some significant differences of
perceptions between these two groups in some very important areas. Superintendents felt
that the shared arrangement reduced their effectiveness as a community advocate, board
presidents did not agree. On the issue of the ability of the superintendent to improve
instruction, superintendents felt that the scope of the job compromised their ability to do
that, not so, according to board presidents. While superintendents claimed they were
wasting time in duplication of paperwork and meetings, board presidents did not perceive
that to be the case. Shared superintendents also felt that their relationship with members
of the originating district, the trust between the superintendent and the board,
communication, and the improvement of performance evaluation all suffered in a shared
agreement, those perceptions were not held by board presidents. On the other hand, board
presidents did not support superintendents’ claims that the increased compensation does
not make up for the additional duties, stress, and increase in workload. Meyer’s study is
significant in that it is quite detailed on just how wide a gap there is between the
perceptions of board presidents and shared superintendents in these types of sharing
agreements.

More recently, Winchester (2003) took up the study of this topic for her
dissertation, she focused on the finances of a shared superintendent, posing the research
question, “Does having a shared superintendent lead to reduced expenses?” (p 5)

Winchester found that, “The significant reduction in superintendent expenses even after four years and the lower per pupil costs and administration per pupil costs compared to the non-shared districts indicated this was a strategy small school districts need to consider when looking at ways to reduce costs and become more efficient” (p 74)

Winchester (2003) also elicited the following recommendations for practice

1. Schools that enter into shared superintendent arrangements need to enter into this arrangement expecting to accomplish something more than just financial savings. Superintendent expenses can be expected to decrease but principal expenses may increase.

2. Beginning a dialogue for a possible merger is a potential benefit of sharing a superintendent. Sharing teachers, bookkeepers, staff development, and standards work are other areas that districts may explore to become more efficient.

3. Districts that are looking for ways to maintain their local school may want to investigate sharing a superintendent to achieve greater administrative efficiency while shifting costs to areas closer to student learning.

4. Allowing administrative personnel to specialize or focus on areas of strength is another important consideration for sharing a superintendent that strengthens the school districts involved (p 75-76)
Another recent study on the topic also took place in Nebraska and was conducted by Edwards (2003) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Edwards facilitated a qualitative case study during which he interviewed eight superintendents in Nebraska who served in a shared capacity with two or more districts. He took the additional step of surveying school board presidents and building principals served by these superintendents. In the abstract of his dissertation, Edwards noted the following five themes:

1. The importance of delegation of duties, it was necessary for some of the work normally done by the superintendent to be divided among building principals and even staff.

2. The time factor, especially the challenge of meeting each district’s expectations for the shared superintendent.

3. The superintendent as chief executive officer, the difficulties of being a chief executive in an organization with multiple sites.

4. The formulation of realistic expectations about the role of the person serving in a shared superintendency by school boards and communities, and

5. The financial aspect, many considered the shared agreement to be a financial savings to the districts, however Edwards found that was not necessarily the case.
Therefore the results of Winchester’s and Edwards’ research in 2003 are not altogether different than those found by Decker, Talbot and McCumsey (1990, 1991) 15 years earlier.

Although there is not a vast array of research on the topic of shared superintendents, there is interesting and pertinent anecdotal information in the literature in which those in these situations share their stories. One of the few journal articles in the past decade on the topic of shared superintendency is entitled *In the Name of Survival the Dual Superintendency* which appeared in the March, 2006 issue of *The School Administrator*. As evidenced by the use of the word “Survival” in the title of the article, author Kate Beem uses anecdotes to illustrate that the chief reason some districts are turning to this initiative is for the preservation of their proud communities. She describes the experience of Michael Cunning who was shared between the districts of Sutherland (385 students) and Hershey (489 students), two districts 15 minutes apart in central Nebraska. Cunning had served as the leader of both districts back in the mid-1980’s for two years, but when merger talks between the districts waned, he decided to return to just serving the Sutherland district, citing the job as, “Two buildings, two schools, two much” (p. 3). However, two decades later when he was again approached about a shared opportunity between the districts, he agreed to do it only if the two districts would agree to a merger feasibility study. At the time the article was written, that feasibility study had not been completed, but according to the president of the Hershey School Board, it was doubtful that a merger would be recommended since both districts were “fine financially.” Three years later, a check of the Hershey District website founds no
indication that the districts are sharing, but Dr Cunning was still listed as the superintendent. Interestingly, he was not listed anywhere on the website for Sutherland Schools – the district he served for many years, according to the article.

In that same article, Beem (2006) recounts the experience of Jason Bailey, who at the time was shared between two very small districts in South Dakota that sit six miles apart. Initially, this arrangement was done because the district that held Bailey’s contract was concerned that they would lose a talented educational leader to a more challenging and better compensated position. According to the article, there was little discussion of trying to merge the districts as they are both fiscally and academically sound. So what constituted “survival” in minds of the boards of these districts was making sure that they provided a challenging and fairly remunerated position in an effort to retain a gifted educational leader. Three years later, Bailey was listed as the superintendent on both districts’ websites.

What makes the Beem research so pertinent is that the districts that are described are utilizing their shared superintendent to maintain their autonomy – their survival, as the title of the article suggests. This would seem to be counter to the earlier research (Decker & Talbot, 1991) that suggests that one of the hallmarks to a working shared superintendency agreement is if the sharing districts are using that arrangement as a step toward future merger or consolidation.

Another interesting point about the Beem article is that The School Administrator inserted a brief cut-out article describing the experiences of Caroline Winchester – the
same Caroline Winchester whose research is described earlier, and who became a shared superintendent. Overall, she noted that her previous dissertation findings closely resembled her real life experiences. However, there were some exceptions.

For one thing, Winchester (2006) noted that, “Board members need to understand and accept that their superintendent won’t be present all the time if a shared superintendency is going to work. It’s no different than the superintendent who has multiple attendance centers in a district. In rural communities, the expectations for the superintendent’s regular presence run very high” (p 23). Pertaining to finances, Winchester wrote, “The two districts experienced a significant savings in superintendent salaries during the first year. Some modest savings remained after five years, but other expenses had increased by then as responsibilities once handled by the two superintendents were shifted to principals and other staff closer to students” (p 23). Her overall summary was, “It is clear there must be a higher good that comes from sharing a superintendent if it is to be effective and long-lasting. The arrangement has to be about learning and creating a positive, supportive climate with high expectations for student success” (p 23). Today, apparently that higher good is determined by the districts, it could be a merger or it could be the opposite—an arrangement that allows them to stay independent.

Another quality article appears in Education Week where correspondent Jeff Archer (2005) writes about the experiences of Bob Lehman, who at the time was in a shared superintendent agreement between two consolidated districts in Iowa. Ackley-
Geneva-Wellsburg-Steamboat Rock and Eldora-New Providence When the agreement was initiated, each district paid half of Lehman’s salary, which increased from $90,000 to $115,000. There were some positives to this arrangement cited in the article, probably the most significant of which was that each district saved enough to employ an additional teacher. The districts also began sharing some professional development opportunities and held some combined meetings to discuss strategies for improving students’ health. However, in the article Lehman commented on the toll the position took on him personally, generally working twelve hour plus days and virtually eliminating his ability to exercise and stay healthy. According to Lehman, the situation would not work unless both districts have strong principals. Indeed the agreement was disbanded a year later when Eldora New Providence returned to the practice of employing their own full time superintendent while Ackley-Geneva-Wellsburg-Steamboat Rock retained the services of Mr. Lehman.

For districts contemplating this option another important consideration is that there is growing evidence regarding the importance of the role of the school leader on the education of the district’s students. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) write in their book *How Leadership Influences Student Learning*, “Our review of the evidence suggest that successful leadership can play a highly significant – and frequently underestimated – role in improving student learning” (p. 5). They list the following two claims: 
1. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.

2. Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most (p. 5).

They expand upon the first claim by noting, “The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects” (p. 5). This is an astonishing amount when one considers how many other influences there are in a student’s educational experience, especially peers, teachers, and parents. But, as they point out in regards to the second claim, “Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst” (p. 5).

Indeed, there is a wealth of research to support this notion that having the right school leader in place is critical to all facets of a successful school learning community. For example, in their book *District Leadership That Works*, Marzano and Waters (2009) quantify the importance of specific leadership behaviors that are associated with student achievement. Their research found five district level leadership “responsibilities” or “initiatives” that have a statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlation with average student academic achievement.

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting

2. Establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
3 Creating board alignment with and support of district goals
4 Monitoring achievement and instruction goals
5 Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction (p 6)

Because this issue of the quantified effect of leadership on student achievement is such an important point, these five responsibilities warrant further examination. Under the heading of ‘ensuring collaborative goal setting’ Marzano and Waters write, “Effective district leaders include all relevant stakeholders, including central office staff, building-level administrators, and board members, in establishing nonnegotiable goals for their districts” (p 6) Obviously, facilitating this kind of collaborative effort would be much more time consuming than a “top-down follow me” kind of approach.

Marzano and Waters second researched leadership responsibility, establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, also requires an investment of time. They write, “Once agreed upon, the achievement goals are enacted in every school site. All staff members in each building are aware of the goals, and an action plan is created for those goals” (p 6) Knowing how challenging it can be to get all stakeholders in an organization, the school leader must be prepared to invest the time to “sell” the goals and create action plans, while at the same time lead efforts to steamroll all obstacles in an effort to get them implemented across the district.

The third responsibility is also time consuming. Although ‘creating board alignment with and support of district goals’ on the surface might seem to be more of a
streamlined process than the first two responsibilities, that would also come with the expectation that all board members are united. That is often not the case. As Marzano and Waters note, “It is not unusual that individual board members pursue their own interests and expectations for the districts they are elected to serve” (p 7). As they go on to summarize, this tendency to work as individuals as opposed to a collaborative team can be quite disruptive to the process of stimulating student achievement. Anyone who has worked with boards knows also that many times matters that seem, and perhaps are more pressing and immediate often pull boards away from a laser focus on student achievement goals. Therefore, this important responsibility to keep their boards focused on student achievement goals, even those that were established collaboratively, creates another drag on the time of a school superintendent.

Perhaps more than any of the five responsibilities, the superintendent’s effort to monitor achievement and instruction goals can be incredibly time-consuming, but yet it must be done to ensure they remain the focal point of all district decision-making. As Marzano and Waters write, “If not monitored continually, district goals can become little more than pithy refrains that are spoken at district and school events and highlighted in written reports. Effective superintendents ensure that each school regularly examines the extent to which it is meeting achievement targets” (p 7).

The final leadership responsibility, allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction, could be less time consuming than the other four responsibilities as long as those four responsibilities have been implemented with fidelity.
Although there will always be disagreements among stakeholders as to how district resources should be spent, Marzano and Waters indicate that good work on the first four responsibilities should create an environment where expenditures are generally accepted and agreed upon.

The literature suggests that focusing on student achievement while dealing with the time constraints described by Marzano and Waters takes an educational leader who is authentic. In their book *Total Leaders Applying the Best Future-Focused Change Strategies to Education*, Schwahn and Spady (1998) offer these three critical performance roles of authentic leaders: creating and sustaining a compelling personal and organizational purpose, being the lead learner, and modeling core organizational values and the principles of professionalism. According to Schwahn and Spady, “These broad arenas of action enable authentic leaders to make the decisions and carry out the plans that constitute the consideration process and achieve the pillar of change to which it is linked, organizational purpose” (p. 43). Certainly some of what is identified in their research can fall under the category of ‘learned behavior,’ but qualities such as being the lead learner and modeling core organizational values may not be learner behavior. Instead, they may need to be part of the leader’s personal makeup, otherwise, they may seem contrived.

That conclusion mirrors a theme with the additional twelve performance roles of a total leader that Schwahn and Spady list:

- Defining and pursuing a preferred organizational future.
• Consistently employing a client focus
• Expanding organizational perspectives and options
• Involving everyone in productive change
• Developing a change-friendly culture of innovation, healthy relationships, quality, and success
• Creating meaning for everyone
• Developing and empowering everyone
• Improving the organization’s performance standards and results
• Creating and using feedback loops to improve performance
• Supporting and managing the organization’s purpose and vision
• Restructuring to achieve intended results
• Rewarding positive contributions to productive change (p. 43)

If this is what leaders are expected to do, and this is who they are expected to be, these challenges may be doubled when leaders are expected to serve more than one district.

Another consideration in this research is the changing nature of leadership. Twenty years ago, the school superintendent’s role was viewed as more of a manager than a leader. In his book *Leading Change*, Kotter (1996) provides a clear differentiation between these two roles. According to Kotter, “Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing,
controlling, and problem solving” (p 25) He goes on to write that the product of management is, “A degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stakeholders” (p 25) These were the skills and abilities that were expected of school superintendents two decades ago, and the results are in line with what Kotter outlines predictability and order.

Kotter contrasts this with the following description of leadership, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (p 25) He believes that the product of leadership is, “Change – often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change” (p 26) Although stakeholders still demand all the aspects of management, today they also want the advantages that leadership can provide.

Evidence of these increasing expectations of school leaders can be found in Daft’s book *The Leadership Experience* (2005) Although he was writing about organizations in general, the following quote can also apply to today’s educational organizations.

The world of organizations is changing rapidly. Globalization, Deregulation, E-business, Telecommuting, Virtual Teams, Outsourcing. People in organizations around the world are feeling the impact of these and other trends, and are forced to adapt to new ways of working. Add to this the recent economic uncertainty, wide-spread ethical scandals, and the insecurity associated with war and terrorism, and leaders are facing a really tough job to keep people grounded, focused and motivated toward accomplishing positive goals. It takes particularly strong leaders to guide people through the uncertainty and confusion that accompanies periods of rapid change (p 7)
Furthermore, Daft points out direct contrasts between what he terms ‘the old paradigm’ and ‘the new paradigm,’ calling this the “new reality for leadership” (p 8). The old paradigm focused on stability and control; the new paradigm calls for change, crisis management, and empowerment. Whereas the old paradigm of leadership was about uniformity and could be self-centered, it is the expectation that today’s leaders be focused on collaboration, diversity, and a higher purpose. Yesterday’s leaders were expected to be heroes, today’s leaders are expected to be humble.

This changing view of leadership creates changing, and in many cases increased expectations of school leaders. Gordon (2006) in *Building Engaged Schools: Getting the Most out of America’s Classrooms* explains this in simple, yet powerful terms.

Inertia among those most closely associated with our public schools is the biggest obstacle to their development. Shaking the system out of its rut won’t be easy, but there’s reason to think it’s increasingly attainable. Business leaders and globalization experts have sounded a clear alarm that we can no longer afford to let the obstacles to education reform keep us from taking bold new steps. As stakeholders in the educational system, they can lay the groundwork in forcing local, state, and national political figures to re-examine how schools might better prepare their students. But ultimately, only when parents and the public are convinced of the need for change will it occur on a large scale. In order to spark the public’s imagination, school and community leaders must paint bold and innovative visions of fully engaged schools (p 282).

Therefore it is clear that the work of the school leader is critical far beyond the classroom, the school buildings, and even the individual school communities themselves. A shared superintendent must accomplish this with multiple communities.
The literature does contain some suggestions on how this can be accomplished. It makes sense that when two important and complex positions are going to be combined into one, as in a shared superintendent situation, either a portion of the current work being done needs to be discontinued, or it needs to move to someone else in the organization. Since very little educational leader work can be arbitrarily discontinued, the alternate concept of distributed leadership is likely necessary in a shared superintendent situation.

According to Hargreaves and Fink (2006) in *Sustainable Leadership*, there are actually several levels of distributed leadership, spanning from autocracy to anarchy. One level above autocracy is 'traditional delegation' in which the leader appoints good deputies, seeks and relies on their counsel, respects their autonomy, hands over some power, and makes sure they report regularly. Next is 'progressive delegation' in which the leader creates new roles, focuses people's roles and responsibilities on learning and improvement, develops proper planning procedures, and continually audits the results. The next highest level of distributed leadership is 'guided distribution' during which better relationships are developed, people are brought together, the quality of professional conversation is improved, core purposes are concentrated upon, and the leaders are regarded as visible and vigilant. A fourth level is called 'emergent distribution', at this level there is a strong effort to make sure purposes and values remain clear and are genuinely shared, a premium on relationships is a focus, staff are encouraged to innovate, there is a culture of professional entrepreneurship, trust becomes more apparent and the leaders step back from watching over all interactions, and there is a conscious effort to
celebrate good results. The top level of distributive leadership according to Hargreaves and Fink is entitled 'assertive distribution' and is evolved from the previous stages through intentional stimulation of wide-ranging debate about important proposals, a demonstration of the value of learning from differences, and a vigorous professional culture that is always seeking to move forward (p. 138). Districts that decide to share a superintendent find themselves somewhere along this continuum of distributed leadership in their efforts to not overburden their shared educational leader.

In their book *School Leadership that Works, From Research to Results*, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) turn this concept of distributed leadership into a five step plan of action that “will help any school leader articulate and realize a powerful vision for enhanced achievement of students” (p. 98). These steps are as follows:

1. Develop a strong school leadership team
2. Distribute some responsibilities throughout the leadership team
3. Select the right work
4. Identify the order of magnitude implied by the selected work
5. Match the management style to the order of magnitude of the change initiative (p. 98)

This plan of action in tandem with the concept of distributive leadership outlined above is connected to the issue of sustainability of the shared superintendent initiative. Educational researcher Michael Fullan (2009) writes about the importance of sustainability in *The Challenge of Change: Start School Improvement Now! From his
research, he has developed four propositions in regard to conditions that favor sustainability

1. **Proposition 1** Sustainability is not about prolonging specific innovations, but rather it is about establishing the conditions for continuous student improvement.

2. **Proposition 2** Sustainability is not possible unless school leaders and system leaders are working on the same agenda.

3. **Proposition 3** Proposition Two notwithstanding, sustainability is not furthered by school and system leaders simply agreeing on the direction of the reform. Rather, agreement is continually tested and extended by leaders at both school and system levels putting pressure on each other. Sustainability is a two-way or multiway street.

4. **Proposition 4** We have a fair idea about what makes for sustainability within one district under conditions of stable leadership over a five or more year period, but we still do not know how sustainability fares when district leadership changes or when state leadership changes direction (p. 176).

Fullan goes on to report:

We have been able to identify some of the main themes of sustainability. They amount to focus, consistency, and mutual reinforcement between the school and district levels, staying the course, and developing an attitude that continuity of good direction and of increased student achievement is paramount. We know sustainability, as in continuous effort and energy, is always vulnerable. We know that sustaining cultures require a lot of work to build and maintain, but can be destroyed quickly with different leadership and change in political conditions. Yet, by making what works explicit, and by enabling more and more leaders at all levels of the system to be aware of the conditions that energize themselves and
those with whom they work, the chance for continued success are greatly enhanced (p 176)

Conclusively, Fullan’s research shows that sustainability of educational success is possible under certain conditions and in certain environments

The literature is also clear regarding how shared leaders can learn to cope with being both successful managers and leaders, the changing and ever increasing expectations from communities and the country, and the pressure to not only attain success, but sustain it According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002) in their book Leadership on the Line Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading they write,

We know from our own mistakes how difficult it is to externalize the issue, to resist the temptation to take it on ourselves People expect you to get right in there and fix things, to take a stand and resolve the problem After all, that is what people in authority are paid to do When you fulfill their expectations, they will call you admirable and courageous, and this is flattering But challenging their expectations of you requires even more courage (p 125)

According to their research, people with the problem need to become the people with the solution Taking this approach may be time-consuming in the short term for the leader, because many times solving the issue is more expedient and more personally gratifying Training and coaching others to solve their own problems is adding an additional challenge to an already challenging situation However, failure to empower others to solve their problems does not build the capacity in the organization that is needed for the sustainability discussed earlier in this chapter When they learn that they have to deal with their own issues, they often find qualities within themselves that they
did not even know they had. These newfound gifts become an added benefit to the school community.

But just redirecting the work is not enough. Heifitz and Linsky go on to write, “So, taking the work off your own shoulders is necessary but not sufficient. You must also put it in the right place, where it can be addressed by the relevant parties” (p 128).

Heifitz (1994) has two additional critical pieces of advice to refocus the potentially overworked and overwhelmed school leader from an early book entitled *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. He writes, “To exercise leadership, one has to expect to get swept up in the music. One has to plan for it and develop scheduled opportunities that anticipate the need to regain perspective. Just as leadership demands a strategy of mobilizing people, it also requires a strategy to deploying and restoring one’s own spiritual purpose” (p 274).

Finally, Heifetz notes, “A leader has to engage people in facing the challenge, adjusting their values, changing perspectives, and developing new habits of behavior. To an authoritative person who prides himself on his ability to tackle hard problems, this may come as a rude awakening. But it should also ease the burden of having to know the answers and bear the uncertainty” (p 276). The shared superintendent is not in this alone. Likely there have been commitments and promises made by others to make this complex situation succeed for the benefit of all of the students in the affected communities. It takes a good deal of fortitude to help those people stand up to their commitments over the long term. But anything short of that greatly decreases the chances that success will occur.
With this type of evidence to show that a board’s choice of leader is going to have a profound and direct impact on the education of the district’s students, they need to give careful consideration before making the choice to share a superintendent. But there are other factors at work that make this a very good time to update the research and expand upon it. Diminished state revenues in Iowa during the final quarter of 2008 and the first three quarters of 2009, combined with a projected continued decline in those revenues, have the potential to greatly impact state financing of Iowa school districts well into the future. For example, in December of 2008, Governor Culver announced a 1.5% across the board cut in state appropriations including education (Clayworth, 2008). In October of 2009 the Governor announced an additional 10% across the board cut (Jacobs, 2009). With these examples of historical reductions in funding, districts need to continuously search for budgetary efficiencies such as the sharing of their district leaders.

Furthermore, due to declining income from investments, the state employee retirement system IPERS (Iowa Public Employee Retirement System) is considering for the first time in many years substantial changes to both the means of contributions and payouts (Petroski, 2009). Predictably, superintendents who are eligible to retire are watching these developments closely and may choose to retire under the current benefit package rather than waiting for a different one that may disadvantage their retirement income. According to a study conducted by David Else at the University of Northern Iowa (Else & Erb, 2011) of the 341 current superintendents in Iowa, 59 are considering retirement in the next 1-3 years, and 40 more are planning to retire in the next 4-6 years. Mounting budgetary factors and a declining pool of superintendents due to retirement
could force a major landscape shift in the superintendency pool in the near future and cause districts to consider the viability of a shared superintendent, since they will have diminishing funds and a potentially smaller pool of candidates from which to draw
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

The goal of this research was to provide school leaders with critical information needed if they are in a position to consider or are forced to consider the viability of a shared superintendent. This study was considered interpretive research in which the main source of information was through interviews with superintendents, building leaders, and support staff supervisors, once all case studies were conducted and concluded, results were summarized Chapter 5 of the dissertation.

This work is classified as interpretive research as opposed to standard qualitative research because, although many of the same procedures are used, the flexibility provided by interpretive research was necessary to gain the most meaningful information. According to Smith (1992), interpretive research is a form of qualitative research but differs from traditional qualitative research in three ways: first, self-inquiry is seen as a useful tool of analysis, second, the concept of “absolute minimums” is set aside, allowing the researcher to vary questions from setting to setting in order to obtain the optimal interpretation, and third, the procedural choices are not constrained by a desire for objectivity. Since so much of the information was gained through the filter of the researcher and the anecdotal evidence gathered during ‘face to face’ interviews of the respondents, it was critical to have this flexibility beyond the normal constraints of qualitative research.
These interviews used a flavor of the same questions that Decker, Talbot and McCumsey (1990, 1991) used 20 years ago, additional questions germane to each group were asked depending on the tenor of the particular interview. Choice of districts was crucial to the success of this study. The overriding factors when choosing which districts to study were length of time in the sharing agreement combined with length of service of the shared superintendent. It was felt that those two factors indicated a satisfaction with the situation from the point of view of both the district and the shared superintendent. The research was therefore limited to districts that had shared the same superintendent for five years or more.

To gain a broad view of shared superintendent situations respondents of two different sharing situations involving four different school districts agreed to participate. In accordance with stipulations provided by the University of Northern Iowa's Institutional Review Board, the superintendents of potential participating districts were given an outline of the study and then asked to respond with a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix C) indicating district willingness to participate in the research. Once that permission was obtained, individual participants who qualified for inclusion in the study were contacted by the researcher and given an outline of the study (Appendix B), those agreeing to participate signed a consent form (Appendix A) prior to responding to interview questions. All potential respondents contacted agreed to participate, all interviews were conducted through completion.
The interviews were held on site at in participants’ respective districts labeled “A,” “B,” “C,” and “D” for the purposes of confidentiality. District A serves approximately 650 students and held the original contract of the superintendent when they entered a sharing agreement in 1999. The District they share a superintendent with, District B is contiguous to District A and serves approximately 450 students. These two districts employ a “pure” shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing; the only services they share are the superintendent and a transportation director. The superintendent shared by Districts A and B was beginning his ninth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Because “pure” sharing situations like that utilized by Districts A and B are so rare and, once entered into, seem to last for such a short time, the second superintendent sharing situation studied had some elements of whole grade sharing included at the time of the study. District C entered into a sharing arrangement with District D beginning in 2004. At the time of the study they remained two separate districts with distinct boards of education, administrative teams, business managers, and supervisors, but did include whole grade sharing elements at the middle and high school levels. District C was by far the larger of the two and the largest in the study, serving over 1100 students and including two separate elementary buildings. District C was the original holder of the superintendent contract. As part of the agreement to share the superintendent, District C sends its sixth grade students to District D. District D is by far the smallest of the four districts highlighted in this study with an enrollment of under 200. District D sends its 7th
through 12th grade students to District C. The superintendent shared by Districts C and D was beginning his sixth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Each of these districts was the subject of a case study wherein the researcher asked the shared superintendent, building leaders, board presidents, business managers, and select supervisors in departments such as transportation, custodial, and grounds/building and maintenance a variety of questions the answers of which, when compiled and synthesized, led to answers to the research questions. Following is a list of those questions, complete with an indication of which research question or questions the information was intended to answer.

**Interview Questions**

1. What was the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent? (RQ #1)
2. What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered? (RQ #1, #3)
3. What advantages have you found in sharing a superintendent? (RQ #1)
4. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent? (RQ #2, #3, #4)
5. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not? (RQ #4, #5)
6. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals? (RQ #2, #3, #4)
7. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community? (RQ #3)
8 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader? (RQ #2, #3, #4, #5)

9 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager? (RQ #2, #3, #4, #5)

10 How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders? (RQ #5)

11 What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee’s role as the result of the decision to share a superintendent? (RQ #5)

12 How does the added work load, if any, factor into the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the interviewee? (RQ #5)

The researcher requested and received permission from the University of Northern Iowa’s Institutional Review Board to have one of the University’s certified research assistants in the room when the interviews were conducted. At the beginning of each interview, but before signing the Consent Form (Appendix A), the respondents were told about the research assistant and her purpose in the room. The assistant was responsible for making sure the digital recorder was working at all times, while at the same time taking notes on respondents’ answers to the interview questions. This format allowed the research to give full focus on the questions that were being asked, along with an opportunity to formulate probing questions allowed by interpretive research.

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher used the notes from the interviews to code the answers to the questions. As detailed in Chapter 1, it was often true
that the answer to one of the interview questions would be applicable, and therefore
coded, to multiple research questions. For example, a respondent's answer to Interview
Question #4, "What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent," could
have been coded to Research Question 2, 3, and/or 4 and used in the reporting of the
applicable section of Chapter 4. Recordings were referenced if a lack of clarity in the
notes elicited a need to refer to the recording.

Data Analysis

This methodology yielded 23 interviews, which identified a critical need to have a
format in place from the onset to categorize and organize the data. Because this was
interpretive research, statistical analysis of numbers was not needed. However, many
comparisons needed to be made from the anecdotal information collected in an effort to
arrive at summaries and results that those schools considering sharing their executive
officer might find helpful and meaningful. The ideal method chosen allowed for
continuous and simultaneous collecting and processing of data. According to Lincoln and
Guba (1985) the best method for accomplishing all of these goals was the Constant
Comparative Method as outlined in their text *Naturalistic Inquiry*.

The first step in utilizing this method involved comparing incidents applicable to
each category. For this study, each research question was considered a category.
Therefore, as questions were asked during the interview and responses given, every
response that could be tied directly back to one of the five research questions was coded
to that question. As noted previously, each interview question was designed to coincide
with a particular research question or set of questions. Additionally, since this was interpretive research and the researcher was consequently allowed to probe interview answers with follow-up questions, further meaningful information was gained, this was also coded to the applicable research question or questions.

The second stage of the Constant Comparative Method involved integrating categories and their properties, in other words, a refinement and synthesis of the information gathered and coded in the first stage occurred. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested, this was not a distinct and separate action, as the “intuitiveness” of the first stage morphed into the more exacting nature of the second stage. This stage was marked by data collection efforts that were directed more specifically at “fleshing out categories, filling in gaps in the larger taxonomy or category set, clearing up anomalies or conflicts, and extending the range of information that can be accommodated” (p 343).

As with the transition between the first two stages, the transition between stage two and three of the Constant Comparative Method was quite seamless. The third stage is called “Delimiting the Construction” and was marked by noticeably fewer modifications in data collection and processing, as the data collected toward the end became less filled with options and probing and more focused on the emerging results of the research.

Using this Constant Comparison Method allowed for continual filtration and funneling of interview results into meaningful and useful data to summarize for the study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

During the month of November, 2010, a total of 23 interviews were conducted in District A (7 interviews), District B (5 interviews), District C (9 interviews), and District D (2 interviews). Each shared superintendent was interviewed only once. Also, since there was additional sharing of duties and job titles in both pairs of situations, whenever that occurred the affected individual was interviewed only once. For example, Districts C and D share both a Director of Facilities and Maintenance and a Director of Transportation. Districts A and B share a Director of Transportation. Although only one interview was conducted with each of these individuals, including superintendents, their responses are represented in this chapter in both cases studies representing the districts they serve in order to provide continuity to each case study.

Interviews were held on site at the respective districts and lasted an average of approximately 40 minutes. Interviews for District A were held in various sites throughout the district including the superintendent’s office, the conference room near the high school principal’s office, an Iowa Communications Network room in the high school, and a conference room in the elementary building, located several blocks away from the high school. Interviews for District B were conducted in the business manager’s office, the superintendent’s office, and in an elementary conference room located in a neighboring town. All of the interviews for Districts C and D were conducted in District C’s Board of Education Conference Center located at one of the elementary buildings.
The researcher was permitted by the University of Northern Iowa's Institutional Review Board to have one of their certified research assistants in the room while the interviews were being conducted. Her function was to take notes during the interview and assure that the digital recording device was working properly throughout. This allowed the researcher to concentrate fully on the interview and utilize the advantage of probing questions permitted through interpretive research. Following the completion of interviews, the recordings were then transferred to a compact disc by the research assistant. The researcher used the notes taken during the interviews, crossed-referenced with the recordings, to support and verify the information contained in the following summaries of the respective case studies.

Each of the four case study summaries that follow utilizes a similar format. First, there is a general overview of the composition of the district, then each of the five research questions are addressed in order. Within each of those five sections, the researcher has organized the review of responses in the following order: principals, business managers, superintendents, board presidents, and any other supervisors that were interviewed. Summary discussion, conclusions, and recommendations can be found in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

Case Study #1 District A

At the time of the interviews, District A served approximately 650 students and held the original contract of the superintendent when they entered a sharing agreement in
1999 The District they shared a superintendent with, District B is contiguous to District A and serves approximately 500 students.

The sharing agreement began as a result of difficulties that District B was experiencing with their newly hired educational leader. That individual had begun in his position in July of 1999, by all accounts within a brief period of time decision-makers in District B decided that the choice of leader that they had made was not a good fit for the district and moved to terminate him. At that point, they contacted neighboring districts for what at the time was assumed would be temporary help. District A agreed to contract a portion of the services of their superintendent to District B.

Within a matter of months, it was apparent to the boards of both districts that this was a mutually beneficial relationship and by the end of the 1999-2000 school year they had decided to continue the shared superintendent arrangement into the future. When the person they were sharing announced his retirement effective for the 2002-2003 school year, the districts collectively sought an educational leader who could continue and further this relationship that, by all accounts, they had stumbled upon. The individual they hired has been in that position since his employment began in July of 2002 and was beginning his ninth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

As an interesting side note, during the time period when the researcher was conducting the interviews for this study, the superintendent had just announced his retirement, and both boards were in the process of determining that they were going to
again jointly seek a person with the skills necessary to continue this shared superintendent relationship

Districts A and B employed a “pure” shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing, the only services they shared are the superintendent and a transportation director. The researcher could find no similar such relationships in the state of Iowa that had been ongoing for this study’s limitation of five years or more.

District A employs a high school principal (grades 9-12), a middle school principal (grades 5-8), and an elementary principal (grades K-4). Each of these positions is full time. District A also has a full time Director of Buildings and Grounds, a full time Business Manager, and a shared Director of Transportation with District B. As with all districts in Iowa, board members are elected by vote of the school district community, the Board President of District A was then elected to that position through a vote of the board members of District A. Following is a summary of their comments as obtained by the interview questions and as they pertain to the research questions.

Research Question #1 What are the Motives for the Decision by Districts to Share Superintendents?

As outlined in Chapter 1, answers to this research question were gathered through the use of three interview questions:

1. What was the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent?
What similarities should be in place before this arrangement is considered?

What advantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?

Principals in district A. Two of the three principals in District A were actually in their current positions when the decision was made to share a superintendent with District B back in the fall of 1999, so they had a very distinct collective recollection of why this decision was made. They both verified that it began as an effort to help a neighboring district through a challenging time as they tried to deal with the termination of their superintendent. Their recollection was that it was originally meant to only continue until District B could find a replacement, however, trying to attract a quality candidate to District B in the middle of the year was proving to be problematic. Additionally, the shared superintendent concept seemed to instantly work well for both districts. District B, having just been through the trauma of releasing their superintendent, was extremely grateful for everything the superintendent of District A was providing for them. Furthermore, District A was enjoying some financial remuneration that they had not expected, one principal’s recollection was that District A was under some financial pressures at the time so those extra funds were serving the district well. The remaining principal in District A, who was not employed in the district at the time, could only speculate that the rationale was based on financial reasons, he professed no background knowledge of the difficulties faced by District B at the time the decision was made to share the superintendent.
The second interview question intentioned to help provide answers to research question #1 asks respondents, based on their current experiences, to speculate what similarities need to be in place before considering this type of shared leadership arrangement. Following is a summary list of the things that the three principals in District A suggested:

1. Districts should be similar in size.
2. The Boards of both districts need to have the capacity to communicate well with each other.
3. The Boards should have similar board philosophies in regards to critical items such as the importance of student achievement, visibility of the superintendent at activities, professional development, and so on.
4. The Boards need to agree ahead of time to specific expectations of the position in areas such as the amount of time to be spent in each district, location of offices, and contract issues.
5. There needs to be a strong, experienced, collaborative principal leadership team already in place.
6. The shared superintendent needs to be well-versed in the tenets of distributed leadership.

In their view, no matter how well-intentioned the consideration to share the superintendent, if any one of these factors are not in place the arrangement will be undermined and the chances of success diminish rapidly.
The three principals in District A were able to easily cite numerous advantages to this type of shared arrangement. These included:

1. The proximity of the sharing districts so that the superintendent is never far away from any school site.
2. There is a larger resource pool of both materials and human capital for initiatives in such things as professional development.
3. Cross-district administrative meetings can be held which improve contacts and relationships with mirrored positions (i.e., elementary principals with elementary principals).
4. Increased financial security.
5. Sharing of ideas, successes and learning opportunities.
6. Principals have their own buildings and are not fractured between other buildings and grade levels.

With their responses, the principals in District A found motives far beyond the obvious financial reasons for this type of arrangement to be considered.

Business manager in District A. The business manager for District A began her tenure in the district after the sharing arrangement had begun, but before the current shared superintendent was hired. It was her understanding that the leadership issues in District B were the overwhelming factor in the consideration to enter the sharing agreement with District A. However, by the time she began her work in District A a year later, both districts were beginning to realize the financial incentives that were available.
She credits the previous shared superintendent with having the foresight, skills, and talent to make the arrangement work so well so quickly.

When asked what similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered, she noted that both districts should have similar, if not identical school calendars, that both administrative teams should work closely not only within the team but with their partner team in the other district, and that she appreciated the fact that she and the business manager from District B had been able to establish such a close working relationship over time. She stated, “Sometimes the superintendent can forget to inform one or the other business manager, but they work to keep each other informed.” This provides an excellent set of check and balances for both districts.

In regards to advantages from her view in sharing a superintendent, District A’s business manager listed the following items: the financial saving and incentives, the fact that the current shared superintendent is always accessible to her either in person or by phone, and that over time they have been able to align policies and philosophies with District B, so that now, when they are in the process of collaborating looking for a new superintendent, they are in sync with what the stakeholders in District B are looking for.

Therefore, according to District A’s business manager, the motives to share a superintendent go far beyond the financial. For her, it has led to having a ‘partner’ business manager in District B who is always available for help, advice, and support. When one considers how challenging and unique the business manager position is, this kind of life line is a real life saver for the business manager in District A.
Shared superintendent in districts A and B. The shared superintendent between Districts A and B recalled being attracted to the position initially because of the opportunities that were offered in having the chance to lead two districts. He had been serving as a superintendent so he brought with him the experience needed to undertake this challenge. Since there had been a shared superintendent in Districts A and B that had preceded him, he was only peripherally aware of the circumstances of the rationale for the districts to begin sharing a superintendent. When asked Interview Question #1, he answered that it was his understanding that it became a necessity for District B to find a quality educational leader in short order due to the mid-year termination of the previous superintendent, and District A was willing to help. By the time he began his tenure as the superintendent of both districts, the financial incentives and the savings that was occurring were already important aspects of both districts’ budgeting practices. So when the position was advertised and when he interviewed it was already clear that both districts had committed to continuing this sharing arrangement. Since that fit with the challenge he was looking for at that point in his professional career, he accepted the role when it was offered.

Due to his unique insight into the situation, it is no surprise that he has a long list of answers for the second interview question what similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered. He did mention that many items on the following list he came to value over time and he understands their significance in reflection, but did understand the value of some of these similarities before assuming the position.
1. Business managers need to be using the same software to assist in reviewing all financial aspects of both districts.

2. All similarities in professional development initiatives and curriculum are important so the superintendent’s focus is not fractured, this also provides for cost sharing between districts.

3. Similar calendars to maximize time management.

4. Having strong teams of principals in each district.

5. A collective community understanding that the superintendent is shared and therefore his/her time is split between those communities.

6. A solid working relationship between both business managers is critical as they provide help and support to each other.

7. A culture of yearly administrative retreats as this is sometimes the best opportunity he has to focus on their work as a unit.

8. Similar administrative goals and evaluation systems.

9. Identical learning core beliefs.

In many cases, these are similarities that the superintendent has forged between districts over time, but he noted that anyone considering this concept should try to have as many of these as possible in place beforehand.

Predictably, the shared superintendent also had some considerations in his answer to the third interview question regarding the advantages to be found in sharing a superintendent. For example, he spoke at length and with tangible examples of how he
would use the ‘trial and error’ portion of an initiative in one district to advantage the other. For example, District A was one of the first in the state of Iowa to begin a technology initiative, when District B begins this initiative next year they will be able to do so more smoothly and more quickly because of the lessons learned from the trial and error portion that District A went through.

He also spoke of the financial savings beyond the obvious ones provided by the sharing arrangement. To illustrate he mentioned that when the state of Iowa began providing additional savings to districts beyond those of sharing a superintendent, such as sharing a transportation director, because of the partnerships already in place Districts A and B were able to take advantage of this opportunity almost immediately and without any obstacles to overcome.

A third advantage he noted was the ability for the districts to attract a quality candidate for his position when he retires at the end of the year. Because the districts have been and can combine resources, they can offer a very competitive salary, which neither would be able to do if searching separately for their school leader. Also, and because of this, they are more likely to get an experienced candidate, had they been going this alone it is unlikely that either district would be able to do that.

Therefore, as with the principals and the business manager, the motives to share a superintendent, according to the person serving in that position, go far beyond the obvious financial reasons. As he noted at the end of the interview, “I love what I do, and I am very proud of what I’ve done.”
Board president of district A. The board president of District A was in his second year of holding that office at the time of the interview, he had been a member of the school board of District A for a total of three and one-half years. Since he was not a member of the board when the decision to share a superintendent a decade before was made, he did not have much to offer in answer to the first interview question about the original rationale to share the superintendent, expect to note that it was done to support District B at the time, and “it stuck.” Again, because of his short history on the school board, he did not have much to contribute toward the answer to the second interview question either, but his comment is very important when noting in answer to what similarities should be in place before this arrangement is considered that, “Boards and communities need to trust the superintendent”.

However, the board president was able to verify some of the previous comments made about the advantages of sharing a superintendent and add to that list. Like several others, he mentioned that spreading the cost of the educational leader over two districts was a great advantage, he also spoke of the importance of shared resources such as professional development and transportation. Additionally, it is his belief that pooling of resources allows for better quality administration. He spoke of the ability of principals to share ideas between districts, as well as the fact that each building in each district has a principal dedicated specifically to that building, neither district would likely be able to afford that model if they had their own dedicated superintendent. According to his comments, this is a more beneficial model than if each district had to employ a superintendent that also worked as a principal. District A’s board president also
commented, “The model here works! There are no worries about where the superintendent spends his time, and both boards are careful to not micromanage.”

**Other supervisors in district A** The researcher was able to interview two additional supervisors that worked in District A—the director of buildings and grounds, who had served District A in that capacity for 28 years at the time of the interview, and the transportation director, who had been with District A for 15 years and had, within the last several years, become the transportation director with District B.

When asked about the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent, the director of buildings and grounds mentioned the budget as the primary reason. Surprisingly, the transportation director was the only one interviewed who said that his recollection of the rationale was that it would lead to possible consideration of whole grade sharing in the future. Neither had lengthy answers to the second interview question regarding similarities between districts that should be in place, but the director of buildings and grounds did say that a great deal of cooperation is needed and everyone in both districts needs to have a willingness to give the situation a “fair shot.”

However, both were effusive about the advantages they have found in sharing a superintendent. The director of transportation listed the a closer relationship with District B, the fact that they can and do share equipment between districts so that purchasing is kept to a minimum, and that they have more streamlined lines of communication on situations like bad weather decision-making as tremendous advantages of the shared superintendent arrangement. The director of buildings and grounds felt that the
arrangement led to a higher morale and that there was much to be said for being so close in so many ways to a neighboring district. He commented, “We don’t just share a superintendent, we share everything.”

Research Question #2. Do Shared Superintendents Face Similar Challenges as Their Counterparts from 20 Years Ago?

As outlined in Chapter 1, four interview questions were utilized to gather answers to this research question.

1. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

Principals in district A. The two highly experienced principals in District A could cite no disadvantages in sharing a superintendent. The only thing mentioned by either was that the superintendent could not attend all the events in both districts, but they also qualified that by saying that he makes a great effort to be at as many of these events as possible. The third principal felt that there were times when the superintendent was needed but unavailable, but he cited this as only a “small disadvantage” as the superintendent was always available by phone and for emergencies. This principal also noted that he had to be very conscientious about scheduling time with the superintendent.
for mentoring activities, especially since he himself was currently studying to be a superintendent.

When asked if sharing a superintendent assists or hampers progress toward district goals, all three principals were united that, in given the choices of the question, they would choose a third option, which was that it does neither. If forced to choose between those two options, they would tack toward “assist” because they have similar goals to District B and because there are added resources which they would not have if each district had its own superintendent.

When their answers were combined, the three principals in District A had an extensive list in ways in which the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader:

1. The ability to pool resources benefits both districts.
2. Although the district leadership team is the driving force for instructional leadership, the superintendent oversees and facilitates this committee, providing direction and research as needed.
3. The leadership teams of both districts are brought together each year to compare progress and discuss ideas.
4. For the most part, professional development is “building-based”, once an initiative is chosen by the district leadership team, each building leadership committee decides how to best implement the initiative in their respective buildings.
5 The superintendent finds a way to be visible in all the buildings and takes an active role in leadership opportunities

6 The superintendent attends professional development during those times when all grade levels of District A are working together

7 When professional development is separated among buildings in District A, the superintendent makes an effort to at least “pop in” to each one

The three principals also had an extensive list of answers when asked how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager

1 The superintendent values the maintenance of all buildings and prioritizes as needed

2 The district is benefitted by having directors (buildings and grounds, transportation, food service, finance) rather than having the superintendent have to take care of it all

3 He has solidified the finances of both districts with his ability to be fiscally responsible

4 He will tell stakeholders that they cannot participate in a particular initiative if they cannot afford to do so

5 He will also find a way to participate in an initiative if there is a compelling educational reason to do so

To summarize, the interviews with the principals were enlightening to the extent that they noted how important it is for today’s superintendent to be viewed as an
instructional leader, as that question generated the most responses of the four questions designed to answer research question #2. However, they were also very forthcoming about the importance of the superintendent as a manager of district resources. It would appear that, from the point of view of the principals of District A, both the instructional leadership and management roles are critical to the success of today's superintendent, but additionally both of these roles can be accomplished even in a shared superintendent arrangement.

Business manager of District A. Although the business manager of District A felt that there were no problems for her personally in working in the shared superintendent situation, she did cite two disadvantages that she saw as a result of the arrangement: lack of visibility of the superintendent in the communities served by Districts A and B, and the fact that the shared superintendent had twice as many board meetings to prepare for and attend, as opposed to a traditional superintendent. As with the principals, the question of whether the shared superintendent situation assisted or hampered progress toward district goals seemed limiting in its choices to the business manager. She felt that it certainly did not hamper, but on the other hand could not express how it assisted, except to note that District A is considered very progressive and has initiated some programs that have quickly been adopted by other schools in the area.

Also similar to the principals, the business manager was back on firmer ground when asked about the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader,
echoing some of the things listed by the principals but also noting some items that they
did not mention

1. The importance and effectiveness of joint professional development
2. The superintendent makes every effort to attend all professional development
3. The superintendent meets regularly with all principals
4. Staff feels very comfortable coming in and talking with the superintendent
5. When he is not available, staff seems to handle that quite well and just keep
   checking back until they can speak to him

The business manager of District A also had some new information to contribute
on the question of the sharing arrangement’s impact on the effectiveness of the
superintendent as a manager

1. The superintendent has a vision of what needs to be done and is very good at
deleagating to those who will do it
2. The superintendent has the ability to successfully communicate with all
departments
3. The board and superintendent have worked collaboratively to establish a five-year
   plan, he keeps the board updated monthly on the progress of the plan
4. The superintendent is by no means a micro-manager, he gives a great amount of
   autonomy, but is also always available if needed

As with the collected observations of the principals of District A, it is apparent
that the business manager views an important aspect of the superintendent’s position to
be instructional leadership, a change in the view held 20 years ago. However, she is not personally impacted by this important additional role of the superintendent. He has the time for her that she needs, and the added help and support of her companion business manager in District B more than makes up for any perceived loss of time or contact that she would have with a superintendent in a traditional setting.

Shared superintendent in districts A and B. Interestingly, the shared superintendent in Districts A and B was able to cite more disadvantages to the sharing situation than either the principals or the business manager. Probably the most poignant of these for this superintendent was that fact that he felt it was much more difficult to get as close to or involved with the students and their activities as he would like. This has been a significant disappointment to him as he approaches the end of his distinguished career in education. In conjunction with the business manager of District A, he also cited the problem of trying to be visible in all the communities he serves. Over time, he believes this has become less and less of an issue as the expectations of community members have changed over the years as they have gotten used to the arrangement. The superintendent also believes that it is a disadvantage that his time and attention is split, but that problem is counterbalanced by the fact that the fact that he is shared allows both districts to have full time principals in each of their buildings. Finally, he said that having two board meetings a month is more challenging than one might think. It is not as easy as changing the name at the top of the agenda, often the districts are doing very different things, so it really is a case of the work of a traditional superintendent being doubled.
The shared superintendent feels that it depends on how things are set up as to whether district goals are assisted or hampered by the sharing arrangement. In the case of Districts A and B, he believes that the progress is assisted because of both districts’ abilities to collaborate and the fact that they have similar goals. He also mentioned that because he has been able to work with the respective boards to strengthen finances in both districts over time, they both get to focus on their goals rather than on financial issues.

It was obviously uncomfortable for this superintendent to talk about his personal effectiveness as an educational leader, but he would obviously have been flattered by the views of the other people interviewed in District A and B. The only comment he would make on the question was, “The superintendent has to be an educational leader (in this situation) because the principals are managers most of the time and the superintendent can see the big picture.”

He was more comfortable speaking about the management role of the shared superintendent when he was asked about the effectiveness as a manager, putting much credit for the success of that aspect of the arrangement on the others in the district. He believes that it is crucial that the shared superintendent not try to micromanage. He advises making sure that the right people are in the right positions and that they clearly understand their roles and responsibilities. Each person must also be able to be positioned to utilize his or her strengths. The superintendent cannot be tied down or responsible for dealing with day-to-day issues or annoyances. A final critical component to the success
of the management of the district according to the superintendent was careful long-term planning. With all the needs for things such as building maintenance and improvement, vehicle acquisition and replacement, and new construction, the five-year plans in both districts serve as excellent guides for keeping both districts on track with needs and fiscally sound.

**Board president of district A.** The board president of District A could only cite two disadvantages to the shared superintendent arrangement, both of which he qualified as “minor.” One was mentioned previously by the business manager of District A in that it is natural that a shared superintendent would have less involvement in the community. He also noted that when principals have issues that they cannot handle, the superintendent may be 20 minutes away. He was unable to recall any specific incidents when this had been a problem in District A. As with everyone else interviewed in District A, he also does not believe that sharing a superintendent hampers progress toward district goals. He mentioned the fact that both districts participated in the Iowa Association of School Board’s Lighthouse Project as an important step in making sure that the goals of both districts align.

From the board president’s perspective, the sharing arrangement had little effect on the superintendent’s abilities to perform as either an instructional leader or a manager. One negative is that the superintendent’s time is spread thinner, so there is less time available to spend in classrooms and buildings, but the current superintendent’s ability and expertise in delegating the right work to strong building principals easily overcomes
this issue. He echoed the superintendent’s viewpoint when he commented, “It is important that the superintendent not be a micromanager. He needs to rely on and expect principals and other leaders to do their jobs.”

Other supervisors in district A. Whereas the Director of Buildings and Grounds in District A could find no disadvantages with the shared superintendent arrangement, the Director of Transportation did mention that sometimes it can be hard to locate the superintendent physically, but also that he was always available by phone. Of the two, the Director of Buildings and Grounds was the only one to comment on the question about sharing a superintendent assisting or hampering progress toward district goals, saying, “It does not hamper, but the goals have nothing to do with sharing. If anything, better economy would allow us to meet bigger goals.”

The Director of Buildings and Grounds was also the only one of the two to comment on the effectiveness of the shared superintendent as an instructional leader and a manager. He believes that having a shared superintendent brings both districts together to brainstorm, which is an advantage to the instructional effectiveness of both districts. He also believes that the superintendent’s ability as a manager is actually enhanced by serving both districts, providing as an example a long list of buildings and grounds improvements that have taken place in the years under which both districts have shared a superintendent. The current superintendent’s ability to say “no” when necessary is seen as an advantage to this director as well knowing that the superintendent will always serve as a safety net gives the director the freedom to think “outside the box,” knowing
that he will be reined in by the superintendent if the dream of the next project exceeds the
district’s capacity to fund it

Research Question #3 Have the Lessons Learned from the Prior Research been Heeded
over the Last Two Decades?

According to the research done by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) one of the main concerns was the excessive overload that was being placed on the person attempting to perform the task. In some cases, the workload was being doubled while the amount of time needed to focus on the work was being halved, creating decreased job satisfaction and eventual “burn out” in even the most motivated individuals. Secondary concerns revolved around the natural loss of relationship-building necessary to be an effective leader, lack of visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position.

As outlined in Chapter 1, five interview questions were designed to help arrive at the answer to this question of whether the lessons outlined by the prior research are being heeded:

1. What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered?
2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?
4 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?

5 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

In synthesizing the responses to these interview questions in relation to Research Question #3, a special emphasis has been placed on respondents’ answers to the third interview question listed, since parts of the other four interview questions have been analyzed previously in this case study. Work overload, relationship-building, visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position are the issues focused on in the following analysis.

**Principals in district A**. The three principals were in agreement that, although extremely busy all of the time and always productive, it was their perception that the superintendent’s work load was manageable. Although they were too modest to do so directly, it was apparent to the researcher that the superintendent was able to work a reasonable schedule due to two main reasons: his ability to delegate tasks to the people in the organization best able to handle those tasks, and the experience and expertise of those people to be able to complete those tasks in an exceptional manner.

This also addressed another issue emphasized by the Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) research in regards to loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. This shared superintendent has been quite savvy in choosing which responsibilities to delegate and which to retain, in so doing he has indeed given up some
personal control over daily responsibilities, but that has been purposeful and has made good sense in consideration of all the circumstances. Therefore, he is not grieving over the loss of that control, since it was his decision to give that up.

However, the principals had quite a bit to contribute to this study concerning the interview question: how does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community? This question was designed to get answers to the issues raised by the previous research regarding the loss of relationship-building thought necessary to be a successful leader and the natural lack of visibility at events that will occur when the superintendent is shared. They collectively felt that not only was this shared superintendent doing an outstanding job of avoiding this concern, but they offered some very specific ways in which he was handling this from their point of view. Following is a summary of their responses to this question.

1. The superintendent effectively alternates big, yearly events (for example graduation, prom, elementary holiday concerts), attending in District A one year and District B the next.

2. When the superintendent has to choose between important events scheduled at the same time in both districts, he makes sure critical stakeholders know what he is choosing and why he is choosing it in advance of the event.

3. A presence is needed at events, it is the superintendent's responsibility to either attend the event or delegate that responsibility to someone else.
4 In District A, principals are seen as holding those community roles more than the superintendent, this has become generally accepted over time

5 The superintendent can prove to be an advocate without additionally being expected to be at every event

6 When the District A and District B are competing against each other, the superintendent always attends and spends half his time representing each district

From the principals' viewpoint, handling these issues of relationship-building and visibility in this manner is a logical, natural, and reasonable trade for all the advantages that the shared superintendent arrangement offers District A

Business manager of district A. The business manager of District A in her answer to the interview question regarding the disadvantages of sharing the superintendent had cited the "lack of visibility in the community" as one of those disadvantages. She elaborated on this point when asked the interview question, "How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?" She noted that the superintendent did not choose to live in any of the communities served by the sharing arrangement, instead, ever since he came to the district he has been living in a larger town in a third neighboring district. In her opinion, this is really the best option for the simple reason that neither community can claim him as "theirs," eliminating that opportunity for jealousy. However, the obvious downside is that he cannot really belong to any of the community service organizations
available, although he does serve on some town boards as a representative of the school district.

The business manager feels that the board members in her district are very good about coming to his defense when this issue is discussed in the community. She also noted that this is brought up during the superintendent evaluation every year in District A, but that each time the conclusion arrived at is that this the best way to handle an obvious weakness of the shared superintendent situation. She also concurred with the principals' point of view that, although always busy, the superintendent is not often overburdened by his workload and seldom shows signs of stress. It is her opinion that he is an outstanding delegating, able to instantly recognize who it would be best to distribute a task to and the fairness of doing so.

**Shared superintendent in districts A and B.** Although the superintendent shared by Districts A and B was not as exacting as the principals as to what steps need to be taken to address the concern of relationship-building with the external community and the natural lessening of visibility at events, he did concur with some of the things they said when asked how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community. For example, he does make a good effort to try to attend all the big events, especially those held during the school day and those that focus on academics. But he purposefully does not belong to any community service groups because to do so holds the real risk of creating unnecessary tension between communities. The superintendent believes that community members
understand that "You have to be where you have to be," and that a diminished community visibility is the trade off for two healthy school districts. It does bother him that he cannot participate in some of those service groups, but to do so could upset a hard fought balance among the communities served by this arrangement.

At no time during the interview did the shared superintendent complain of an excessive workload or a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. He seemed to feel that the pressures and stress he feels are no different than those of his peers and are seldom if ever a result of being shared between two districts. Whenever he could, he gave credit for what was being accomplished to the efforts and expertise of the people he works with.

Board president of District A. There was no indication during the interview of the board president of District A that he felt the shared superintendent was pressured or stressed abnormally due to the responsibility of being the executive leader of multiple districts. Interestingly, in the Meyer (1990) research, this was a disconnect between the board presidents and the shared superintendents, the superintendents felt that the shared superintendent arrangement added much more to their stress than the board presidents did. In District A, even when interviewed independently, it is apparent that both the board president and the superintendent agree that the pressure and stress has been minimized due to efforts on everyone’s part to make this work for the benefit of the students of both districts.
It would also be easy to suggest that from the comments of the business manager, who believes that board members at times need to defend the superintendent’s absence at certain events, that the board president would be constantly approached about the superintendent’s lack of visibility. However, the board president did not mention this, instead indicating that there was indeed a lack of involvement in community matters, but that community members “don’t make a fuss,” and that the superintendent’s visibility at school events seems to be enough to appease those who would otherwise complain.

Other supervisors in district A. Neither the Director of Transportation nor the Director of Buildings and Grounds commented specifically on any noticeable excess stress by the shared superintendent due to a perceived increased workload or due to a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. It was the researcher’s observation that they both seemed to relish their roles and abilities in helping the superintendent not get overstressed about issues which they could help or control. They also greatly appreciated the autonomy that they experience in their work, both being highly experienced in their position, it was obvious that they enjoyed not being “micro-managed” by someone who might not have their level of expertise.

Unlike the other individuals or groups interviewed, the directors did not have much to offer regarding the interview question how does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community. The Director of Transportation simply indicated that it is “not an issue.” The Director of Buildings and Grounds did have two important “suppositions” to share,
however He commented that, because the superintendent does not live in either community, what could be a contentious issue – that of the tax rate in the respective districts – never really comes up. Evidently, there is some disparity between the rates, but because the shared superintendent does not live in either district, he cannot be accused of favoring one district over another on this tax issue. In his final comment regarding the community advocate question, the Director of Buildings and Grounds also offered, “Complaints may emerge, but they are quickly disregarded, because the people making those complaints are going to complain anyway.”

Research Question #4 Are There any New Challenges Facing Superintendents Today?

As with Research Question #3, there were five interview questions designed to answer Research Question #4 Are there any new challenges facing superintendents today? The five interview questions were

1. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
3. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
5. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?
Although none of these five interview questions specifically addresses the research question, the researcher used the respondents’ answers to these questions combined with the historical view of a superintendent provided through the Review of Literature in Chapter 2 to arrive at the following conclusions from the following groups.

**Principals in district A.** If asked the direct question, the three principals in District A would most likely suggest that the shared superintendent situation that has developed between their district and District B has elements of the classical view of a superintendent from twenty years ago, combined with the new expectations that stakeholders hold of their educational leader.

As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, twenty years ago, the school superintendent’s role was viewed as more of a manager than a leader. In his book *Leading Change*, Kotter (1996) provides a clear differentiation between these two roles. According to Kotter, “Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving” (p. 25). He goes on to write that the product of management is, “A degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stakeholders” (p. 25). These were the skills and abilities that were expected of school superintendents two decades ago, and the results are in line with what Kotter outlines: predictability and order.
Kotter contrasts this with the following description of leadership, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (p. 25) He believes that the product of leadership is, “Change – often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change” (p. 26) As noted in Chapter 2, although stakeholders still demand all the aspects of management, today they also want the advantages that leadership can provide.

Also in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Daft (2005) points out direct contrasts between what he terms ‘the old paradigm’ and ‘the new paradigm,’ calling this the “new reality for leadership” (p. 8) The old paradigm focused on stability and control. The new paradigm calls for change, crisis management and empowerment. Whereas the old paradigm of leadership was about uniformity and could be self-centered, it is the expectation that today’s leaders be focused on collaboration, diversity, and a higher purpose.

Therefore, the new challenges facing school leaders today include visioning, persuading stakeholders to support that vision, inspiring change to happen despite the obstacles, managing crises, and empowering diverse groups to collaborate toward a higher purpose.

Elements of all of these new challenges are evident in the remarks made by the three principals in District A regarding their shared superintendent situation. For example, a vision in District A that had been recently initiated at the time of the
interviews was a one-to-one technology initiative at the high school in which each student received his or her own dedicated laptop computer for research and assignment completion. District A was one of the first districts in the state of Iowa to move to this concept. Just finding the resources to support this vision took persuasion on the part of the superintendent, as it would have been a challenge for some people to justify the value of the cost of this initiative. Change was inspired, as staff had to learn almost overnight how to adjust their teaching methods to the new technology. Crises were managed, for example, in order for this to work the whole high school building had to become “wireless” which presented its share of problems. But after a short time all groups were able to collaborate toward this higher purpose and by all internal measures this is working well in District A.

In general, the three principals of District A would recommend a shared superintendent concept to face these new challenges of leadership. They understand the reality that the financial pressures place on the number of leaders that a district can support, this combined with their belief that there are fewer quality superintendents available to fill positions makes them think that this arrangement is very workable. They all believe that a shared superintendent model with a principal dedicated to each building is far superior to a model where a superintendent is not shared with another district but serves an additional role in the district, such as an elementary principal.

This support from the principals does come with some caveats, however. One principal said that compatibility of the two sharing districts is critical to making this
work, as the superintendent has to face these new challenges of leadership with two
districts, not just one. That principal also believes that prior executive leadership
experience is needed coming into the position in order to be able to successfully handle
all of the demands of the position. Another principal noted that it would be critical that
both districts are financially sound, as it would be an additional unwelcome challenge if
one or both of the districts was facing financial pressure.

Business manager of district A. In conjunction with the three principals, the
business manager would agree that the new challenges as outlined by the research are
indeed true of the current view of the superintendent position, and that a shared
superintendent can meet these new challenges under the right conditions. She cited the
example above of the one-to-one computer initiative as an excellent illustration of how
District A is visionary and progressive.

From her point of view, it would be critical that the sharing districts employ
separate business managers, and that those business managers have an extremely close
working relationship. At times, according to District A’s business manager, the shared
superintendent will get distracted with the complexity of his work and forget what
information he has relayed to one or the other of the business managers. However, they
are constantly in contact with each other and provide the checks and balances that each
needs to make sure they stay proactive in their challenging positions.

She recommends that districts who are in the position to consider this sharing
arrangement are mindful of these new challenges, carefully research the pros and cons of
this concept, and do careful analysis of how those pros and cons apply to their particular situation before entering into it.

Shared superintendent of districts A and B. The superintendent shared by Districts A and B brought an interesting perspective to this research question concerning the new challenges faced by superintendents today. Prior to becoming the shared superintendent in this situation, he had served as a superintendent of a single district. He believes that the new challenges really do not have much to do with the additional responsibilities of serving multiple districts as their executive leader. Instead, they have more to do with increasing expectations placed on districts by state and federal lawmakers. Mandated initiatives such as compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the state of Iowa's Core Curriculum are the greatest contributors to additional work for district executive leaders. Although the No Child Left Behind Act had been recently passed when he began his tenure at Districts A and B, no one at the time was aware of the additional work and reporting that would bring to districts. From his point of view, the reporting is constantly being added to, with no consideration given to reducing or deleting antiquated reporting.

To handle these new challenges, he forces himself to maintain a laser-like focus on the issues that have the biggest impact on the district. He admits to having no problem “farming out” compliance reporting to other people in the district when he knows that they will do solid work with that reporting, with a careful eye toward whether in the process of relieving a burden from his work he is not overburdening someone else.
The shared superintendent would agree with the principals and the business manager in that he would recommend this arrangement, but he also has some caveats. He believes that this will only work well if there are strong leadership teams in place in both districts and if both business managers are experienced and highly qualified. He commented, “The superintendent needs to see the big picture and understand that others in the organization are capable of completing tasks. Proper delegation is the key.”

Board president of district A. The board president of District A had only served on the school board for a little over three years at the time of the interview and just two years in his capacity as board president, that had been his only contact with K-12 education since he himself was a student. Therefore, he had none of the historical experience necessary to help with this research question. The current challenges that he sees the shared superintendent addresses are the only challenges of which he is aware. However, when asked if he would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement he did say that he would indeed recommend it, but he felt there was a size threshold that needed to be considered. In other words, this arrangement works well in districts the sizes of Districts A and B, but might not work so well in districts that are markedly larger or smaller.

Other supervisors in district A. Being somewhat removed from the educational aspect of District A and solely focused on the management aspect, it was to be expected and natural that the Director of Transportation and the Director of Buildings and Grounds did not have anything to contribute to the answer to Research Question #4. The
management issues that they deal with on a day-to-day basis, such as vehicle
maintenance, weather concerns, building and grounds updates, and so on have been
traditionally viewed as items on which they partner with superintendents, no different
today than it was twenty years ago. However, they both would recommend this type of
arrangement to others that are considering it. As with the principals, largely because of
the financial savings, the two directors are not concerned about any efforts to combine
their positions into one position, allowing each to focus singularly on his work.

Research Question #5 What Impact on the Roles of District Leaders, if any, has Resulted
from the Decision to Share a Superintendent?

As outlined in Chapter 1, six interview questions were designed to answer this
research question. The interview questions were

1. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared
   superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
2. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent
   as an instructional leader?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent
   as a manager?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the
   superintendent and other district leaders?
5. What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee’s role
   as the result of the decision to share a superintendent?
6 How does the added work load, if any, factor into the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the interviewee?

The focus of the following summarization of the findings on this research question will be on respondents’ answers to the last three interview questions listed above, as they pertain most directly to the research question. Information from the first three interview questions will be added peripherally on an “as needed” basis for clarification and elaboration.

**Principals in district A.** The principals of District A had much to contribute when asked, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” It was clear from their comments that the quality and quantity of communication was viewed as critical to making sure the district was running smoothly. Following is a summary of their observations on this interview question.

1. Constant contact between the superintendent and district leaders is critical.
2. The superintendent is always easily reachable, both board secretaries always know where he is and how he can be contacted.
3. “Face” time is important, this superintendent does a “good job” getting to all the district buildings on a regular basis.
4. It is important that they hold regularly scheduled administrative meetings, the focus is to make every moment as a team together meaningful and productive.
No one thinks twice about calling the superintendent in an emergency, he is always gracious and never irritated by these "interruptions".

E-mails and phone calls become the main forms of communication.

Need to schedule an appointment for a face-to-face conversation when he is not scheduled to be in District A.

It was obvious to the researcher that what makes the communication work so well in District A is the respect that the principals have for the superintendent and his time constraints, and vice versa. All parties are very conscientious about making every attempt to handle a problem or issue themselves before calling and "bothering" someone else. The principals made no mention of relying on each other for help and advice, although this almost certainly happens. However, a barrier to this is the fact that each is in a separate building, with the middle school principal’s building located at least 10 miles away from the other buildings.

When asked, "What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee’s role as a result of the decision to share a superintendent?" the principal who had most recently been hired noted that he did not feel that any additional responsibilities had been added, as things are the same for him as they were when he came into the position several years ago. However, the other two principals, who had both been serving in that capacity prior to the beginning of the sharing arrangement, offered the following as responsibilities that had been added as a result.
1 Increased responsibility for Annual Progress Report
2 Increased responsibility for Adequate Yearly Progress Report
3 Increased responsibility for Comprehensive School Improvement Plan
4 Increased responsibility for Basic Educational Data Survey
5 Added supervision of support staff
6 An understanding that the principals carry “extra weight” in decision-making because of the shared superintendent situation

Both of the experienced principals raised the question as to whether these increased responsibilities were the result of the shared superintendent arrangement, or whether they were the result of overall increased reporting required by changes in federal and state regulations. Neither felt like they were doing an excess of reporting, and neither felt that they were doing additional reporting than what they understood their peers to be doing in districts that were not sharing a superintendent

Finally, when asked if the additional workload factored into their effectiveness and job satisfaction, one principal offered that it actually increased job satisfaction. With the added responsibilities had come a feeling of being an important part of the district as a whole, when that was joined with the pride that came with meeting all the obligations of the increased demands, it was a powerful combination that led to a great satisfaction of his role in all that was being accomplished. The other two principals, neither of which had noted much of an increase in workload due to the shared superintendent arrangement, felt that their effectiveness and job satisfaction was not impacted by this arrangement.
Business manager of District A. As was the case with the principals of District A, the business manager had much to offer regarding the interview question, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” It was her observation that he is always available and accessible, that he is very good about letting both board secretaries know his schedule and trusts their ability to communicate it to others, and that he is especially conscientious that District A’s elementary is currently not being served by any male staff, so he always has an eye toward whether he might be especially needed to help in that building. She also commented on this shared superintendent’s ability to communicate well with all groups—teachers, students, administrative team, staff, and community members. She feels he is well-regarded as a great listener and as someone who can empathize with about any situation that arises. Finally, she also commented that she felt it was important that, when necessary, he is comfortable questioning the decisions that have been made by other district leaders, guiding them toward reconsideration or remission if needed.

The business manager of District A felt that very few additional responsibilities have been added to her position as a result of sharing a superintendent with District B. The only responsibility that consumed much of her time was an additional involvement in the certified enrollment process during the first two weeks of each October. But she qualified this by indicating that it was her understanding that she was not doing anything extra above and beyond what other business managers in a traditional setting were doing. She also expressed a strong feeling of job satisfaction, saying that a big part of this for
her is the fact that the current superintendent provides a great deal of positive reinforcement and lets everyone know that they are appreciated.

**Shared superintendent of districts A and B.** When asked about how the sharing arrangement impacts the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders, the superintendent shared between Districts A and B was able to provide a great deal of insight into the techniques he uses to make sure that all stakeholders feel they are communicated with constantly. For example, he makes every effort to be in each building at least once per week – this involves five buildings among the two districts he leads. He also makes every effort to contact each building principal on a daily basis. He understands that they know that he is always available to them, but he feels it is critical to show this through these kinds of actions. The superintendent also offers to help building leaders get better, is supportive, and lets them know that he can empathize with the work they are doing and that he always “has their back.”

It is obvious that his additional responsibilities as a result of this arrangement have, in effect, doubled, but he was fully aware that this would be true when he accepted the position and has embraced this as a challenge. As the situation has evolved through the years, his work has essentially worked its way to “manageable” status as he has expertly focused on the most important aspects of being a superintendent in multiple districts and delegated other responsibilities to those in the organization most capable of handling them. This ability to do outstanding work in a seemingly virtually impossible situation has provided him with a great deal of job satisfaction. He suggests that no one
should be afraid to consider taking on this type of arrangement, but they need to be prepared for being constantly busy, for much more travel than most superintendents, and for the extra organization that by necessity is involved in making this work so well for everyone involved. He commented, "I love what I do, and I am very proud of what I have done."

Board president of district A The board president of district A did not feel that the sharing arrangement had any impact on the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders. In fact, he felt that there was not much reason for him to be in constant contact with the superintendent. Instead, they contact each other generally by email, and the board president is satisfied with that arrangement. When asked about the additional responsibilities that had been added to his role as a result of the sharing arrangement he noted that he did not know "any difference" since this has been the only situation that he has operated under, but even so he did not express any desire for communication to be better or different.

When prodded about possible additional responsibilities, the board president did mention that this sharing situation did perhaps add "extra complexity" with the upcoming superintendent search that needed to be done in an effort to replace the retiring superintendent. In traditional cases, this would be a daunting task, but in this case, since the two districts have agreed to search for an individual who can continue to be shared between districts, the needs of two different districts and learning communities must be taken into consideration. However, he did mitigate this by saying that since the districts
had been sharing for so long, they were finding that there was general agreement in almost all aspects of what both districts were seeking in their next executive leader and was predicting no problems of being on the same page with District B when it came time to make a choice to fill the position.

Other supervisors in district A. When asked about how the sharing arrangement impacted the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders, both the Director of Transportation and the Director of Buildings and Grounds said one thing stood out with the current shared superintendent — his ability to listen. They both felt comfortable giving their input whenever they had something to share, and they felt that their ideas and thoughts were always honored by the superintendent. The director of buildings and grounds added that the superintendent is always available by phone and can be anywhere in either district within twenty minutes for a face-to-face conversation if needed.

The only additional responsibility that impacted either of them due to sharing a superintendent with another district was that the director of buildings and grounds felt like he was more responsible than he had been previously for disciplinary measures with his staff. However, he also saw this as not a problem and probably a good thing, as his staff regarded him with more authority and he made more of a conscious effort to oversee all aspects of the buildings and grounds work throughout District A. The director of transportation did comment that he was now responsible for overseeing transportation matters in both districts, but he was quick to qualify that was probably more of a natural
evolution and a result of practicality combined with available state incentives rather than a result of the sharing of a superintendent between districts

Both directors expressed extreme satisfaction with their jobs and felt like they had the opportunity to be very effective in their current roles. The ability to share equipment and bounce ideas off of peers in District B allowed them to be even better in their positions than they were before they started sharing a superintendent.

**Case Study #2 District B**

At the time of the interviews, District B served approximately 500 students. Grades 6-12 attended classes in one town in the school district, students in grades K-5 attended classes in a different town located in the school district. The district they shared a superintendent with, District A was contiguous to District B and served approximately 650 students.

The sharing agreement began as a result of difficulties that District B was experiencing with their newly hired educational leader. That individual had begun in his position in July of 1999, by all accounts within a brief period of time decision-makers in District B decided that the choice of leader that they had made was not a good fit for the district and moved to terminate him. At that point, they contacted neighboring districts for what at the time was assumed would be temporary help. District A agreed to contract a portion of the services of their superintendent to District B.
Within a matter of months, it was apparent to the boards of both districts that this was a mutually beneficial relationship and by the end of the 1999-2000 school year they had decided to continue the shared superintendent arrangement into the future. When the person they were sharing announced his retirement effective for the 2002-2003 school year, the districts collectively sought an educational leader who could continue and further this relationship that, by all accounts, they had stumbled upon. The individual they hired has been in that position since his employment began in July of 2002 and was beginning his ninth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

As an interesting side note, during the time period when the researcher was conducting the interviews for this study, the superintendent had just announced his retirement, and both boards were in the process of determining that they were going to again jointly seek a person with the skills necessary to continue this shared superintendent relationship.

Districts A and B employed a “pure” shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing. The only services they shared are the superintendent and a transportation director. The researcher could find no similar such relationships in the state of Iowa that had been ongoing for this study’s limitation of five years or more.

District B employs a secondary principal (grades 7-12) and an elementary principal (grades K-6). Each of these positions is full time. District B also has a full time Business Manager and a shared Director of Transportation with District A, whose
responses are reflected in the Case Study of District A. The researcher was not provided the opportunity to interview any other directors in District B. As with all districts in Iowa, board members are elected by vote of the school district community, the Board President of District B was then elected to that position through a vote of the board members of District B. Following is a summary of their comments as obtained by the interview questions and as they pertain to the research questions:

**Research Question #1: What are the Motives for the Decision by Districts to Share Superintendents?**

As outlined in Chapter 1, answers to this research question were gathered through the use of three interview questions:

1. What was the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent?
2. What similarities should be in place before this arrangement is considered?
3. What advantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?

**Principals in District B.** Although one of the principals in District B was just beginning his first year in the district as a principal, the other principal in District B had just begun his current position as secondary principal when the decision was made to share a superintendent with District A back in the fall of 1999, so he had a very distinct collective recollection of why this decision was made. He verified that it began as an effort to help his district through a challenging time as they tried to deal with the termination of their superintendent. During that transitional time, out of necessity he assumed many duties normally reserved for a superintendent. This was a tremendously
difficult situation as he had only been a principal for a few months and had little experience in the position he had been contracted for, much less in the now vacated position of superintendent. To complicate matters, the business manager of the district had also just left during this time to take a similar position in a different district.

This principal’s recollection is similar to that of the principals in District A in that the sharing arrangement was originally meant to only continue until District B could find a replacement, however, trying to attract a quality candidate to District B in the middle of the year was proving to be problematic for the reasons described above. Additionally, the shared superintendent concept seemed to instantly work well for both districts. District B, having just been through the trauma of releasing their superintendent, was extremely grateful for everything the superintendent of District A was providing for them. Furthermore, District A was enjoying some financial remuneration that they had not expected, one principal’s recollection was that District A was under some financial pressures at the time so those extra funds were serving the district well. The elementary principal in District B, who actually had taught previously in District B but was not employed in the district at the time that the decision was made to share the superintendent, could only speculate that the rationale behind the decision was the financial savings that both district incurred.

The second interview question intended to help provide answers to research question #1 asked respondents, based on their current experiences, to speculate what similarities need to be in place before considering this type of shared leadership.
arrangement. Following is a summary list of the things that the two principals in District B suggested:

1. Both districts must have a “sharing philosophy,” meaning that everyone must understand that the superintendent needs to be where he or she needs to be – strict adherence to contracted days or hours will not work well.

2. Both boards of education must outline expectations with the shared superintendent, as well as with each other, from the onset of the agreement.

3. Having established, respected administration in place is very helpful.

4. Districts should be of similar size and close in proximity, which allows the superintendent to maintain balance and do the job as contracted.

Although their list differed somewhat from that of the principals in District A, they were just as passionate that no matter how well-intentioned the consideration to share the superintendent, if any one of these factors are not in place the arrangement will be undermined and the chances of success diminish rapidly.

Unlike the three principals in District A, the two principals in District B were not able to cite numerous advantages to this type of shared arrangement. Whereas the principals in District A collaborated on seven specific advantages, the principals in District B were only able to note two distinct advantages: (1) The financial savings allowed for more money for teachers, keeping class sizes reasonably small, and (2) Districts can learn from each other’s successes and failures when implementing initiatives. In support of the second point, one principal in District B provided an example...
of how their district chose to not begin a writing initiative that District A had implemented once they saw all that was involved, how both districts had collaborated on a reading initiative that saved time and efficiencies on training, and how District B chosen some elementary series that District A also looked at and then decided was not for them.

**Business manager in district B.** The business manager for District B began her tenure in the district at almost the same time that a decision was made by District B’s school board to terminate the superintendent and look for a partner with which to share. Ironically, the fact that the district had just lost their business manager to a neighboring district was not only the reason that the business manager position was open, but also a catalyst for the board to seek to terminate the superintendent. In the interview, she commented that a lack of knowledge by the superintendent “caused issues and people left.” Therefore, it was her understanding that the leadership issues in District B were the overwhelming factor in the consideration to enter the sharing agreement with District A. She also added that two other issues factored into the decision. It appears that there were burgeoning budget issues on the horizon for District B, and because enrollment was in decline there appeared to be no reason to employ a full time superintendent.

When asked what similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered, she could not really come up with any, indicating that from her point of view this arrangement is workable in practically any situation. When asked about the advantages found in sharing a superintendent, like District A’s business
manager, she appreciated the fact that she and the business manager from District A had been able to establish such a close working relationship over time. She also felt that the savings and the sharing incentives were an advantage, but did suggest that districts and people within those districts really need compatibility in order to sustain this arrangement over time, as both districts have been able to do.

Therefore, according to District B’s business manager, the motives to share a superintendent are mostly financial, but she would agree with the business manager of District A that this arrangement has led to having a ‘partner’ business manager in District B who is always available for help, advice, and support.

Shared superintendent in districts A and B. The shared superintendent between Districts A and B recalled being attracted to the position initially because of the opportunities that were offered in having the chance to lead two districts. He had been serving as a superintendent so he brought with him the experience needed to undertake this challenge. Since there had been a shared superintendent in Districts A and B that had preceded him, he was only peripherally aware of the circumstances of the rationale for the districts to begin sharing a superintendent. When asked Interview Question #1, he answered that it was his understanding that it became a necessity for District B to find a quality educational leader in short order due to the mid-year termination of the previous superintendent, and District A was willing to help. By the time he began his tenure as the superintendent of both districts, the financial incentives and the savings that was occurring were already important aspects of both districts’ budgeting practices. So when
the position was advertised and when he interviewed it was already clear that both
districts had committed to continuing this sharing arrangement. Since that fit with the
challenge he was looking for at that point in his professional career, he accepted the role
when it was offered.

Due to his unique insight into the situation, it is no surprise that he has a long list
of answers for the second interview question: what similarities between districts should
be in place before this arrangement is considered. He did mention that many items on the
following list he came to value over time and he understands their significance in
reflection, but did understand the value of some of these similarities before assuming the
position.

1. Business managers need to be using the same software to assist in reviewing all
   financial aspects of both districts.
2. All similarities in professional development initiatives and curriculum are
   important so the superintendent’s focus is not fractured, this also provides for cost
   sharing between districts.
3. Similar calendars to maximize time management.
4. Having strong teams of principals in each district.
5. A collective community understanding that the superintendent is shared and
   therefore his/her time is split between those communities.
6. A solid working relationship between both business managers is critical as they
   provide help and support to each other.
A culture of yearly administrative retreats as this is sometimes the best opportunity he has to focus on their work as a unit.

Similar administrative goals and evaluation systems.

Identical learning core beliefs.

In many cases, these are similarities that the superintendent has forged between districts over time, but he noted that anyone considering this concept should try to have as many of these as possible in place beforehand.

Predictably, the shared superintendent also had some considerations in his answer to the third interview question regarding the advantages to be found in sharing a superintendent. For example, he spoke at length and with tangible examples of how he would use the ‘trial and error’ portion of an initiative in one district to advantage the other. For example, District A was one of the first in the state of Iowa to begin a technology initiative, when District B begins this initiative next year they will be able to do so more smoothly and more quickly because of the lessons learned from the trial and error portion that District A went through.

He also spoke of the financial savings beyond the obvious ones provided by the sharing arrangement. To illustrate he mentioned that when the state of Iowa began providing additional savings to districts beyond those of sharing a superintendent, such as sharing a transportation director, because of the partnerships already in place Districts A and B were able to take advantage of this opportunity almost immediately and without any obstacles to overcome.
A third advantage he noted was the ability for the districts to attract a quality candidate for his position when he retires at the end of the year. Because the districts have been and can combine resources, they can offer a very competitive salary, which neither would be able to do if searching separately for their school leader. Also, and because of this, they are more likely to get an experienced candidate, had they been going this alone it is unlikely that either district would be able to do that.

Therefore, as with the principals and the business manager, the motives to share a superintendent, according to the person serving in that position, go far beyond the obvious financial reasons. As he noted at the end of the interview, “I love what I do, and I am very proud of what I’ve done.”

**Board president of district B** The board president of District B was not sure exactly what year she came onto the board as a board member, but recalled that it was about the same time that the current superintendent was beginning his position, which would have been in the fall of 2002. As with the board president of District A, since she was not a member of the board when the decision to share a superintendent a decade before was made, she did not have much to offer in answer to the first interview question about the original rationale to share the superintendent, expect to note that it was “a necessity” for District B at the time, and that the financial benefits were immediately apparent. By the time she became a board member, it was obvious that the situation was working and that both boards hoped to continue the arrangement well into the future.
Unlike the board president for District A, the board president for District B felt there were many similarities that needed to be in place before this sharing arrangement is considered. Most important, in her opinion, is that the districts need to have the same beliefs and culture, including the number one belief that all students can achieve. They also must have the same requirements and expectations of a superintendent, and have strong business managers and board secretaries in place. She noted that both boards had participated in the Iowa Association of School Board’s initiative “The Lighthouse Project” during the same time period, and in so doing solidified common core beliefs.

When asked about the advantages found in sharing the superintendent, the board president of District B echoed many of the previous comments made about the advantages of sharing a superintendent by the board president of District A, mentioning that spreading the cost of the educational leader over two districts was a great advantage, as well as the importance of sharing resources such as professional development and transportation between shared districts. Specifically in the area of professional development, she noted that staff are able to collaborate with each other and share expertise, at the same time they can more efficiently implement initiatives, learning from each other’s trials and errors.

Research Question #2. Do Shared Superintendents Face Similar Challenges as Their Counterparts from 20 Years Ago?

As outlined in Chapter 1, four interview questions were utilized to gather answers to this research question.
1 What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?

2 Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?

3 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?

4 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

**Principals in district B.** Whereas the two highly experienced principals in District A could cite no disadvantages in sharing a superintendent, the highly experienced principal in District B said that a disadvantage for him was that even after all of these years he continued to have to devote time out of his day for what he deemed to be “superintendent duties” He did not list or qualify what these duties were The other principal in District B, who is in his first year as a principal, said that a disadvantage for him was the lack of “face-to-face” time he gets with the superintendent He would appreciate more mentoring opportunities than he is getting, but he also noted that proximity may be just as much a problem as the fact that the superintendent is shared, as his building is located miles away from the superintendent’s office He also appreciated that this superintendent is making every effort to spend as much time with him as possible and is constantly checking on his progress as a beginning school leader, but he did feel that he is not getting as many mentoring opportunities as some of his peers

When asked if sharing a superintendent assists or hampers progress toward district goals, the experienced principal said that, “they were not hampered here,” but also
added that if a district is lacking structure, this could be a real issue. He felt that District B "did not have a lot of goals," but instead chose a few very meaningful ones and worked hard on the ones they have. The new principal in District B was the only one of the five principals served by this sharing arrangement that felt that sharing a superintendent assisted progress toward district goals. He said, "The other district can provide a positive model for policies and initiatives and can complete the leg work on what will or will not work so that it is not attempted."

When their answers were combined, the two principals in District B had a shorter list than the principals in District A in ways in which the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader, and they saw both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, one District B principal said that having a shared superintendent provided a larger view to the districts of "what's out there" so that they could take advantage of initiatives that other districts are doing. He cited the one-to-one laptop computer initiative in District A as an example. However, the other District B principal felt that "Instructional leadership duties have become the responsibility of the district leadership team," with the superintendent taking more of a managerial role, supporting initiatives through financial leadership.

The two principals in District B also had a shorter list of answers than their counterparts in District A when asked how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager. One principal noted that this type of arrangement certainly highlights the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the superintendent's...
ability to manage duties and responsibilities, and that this superintendent clearly had the communication skills and organizational abilities to make this work well for both districts. The other principal felt that a significant part of the management aspect of the shared superintendent position involved trusting principals to “do their jobs” but also to be there for help and advisement when necessary. He added that this superintendent “gives them leeway to learn and make mistakes, but not critical errors” as part of his management style.

**Business manager of district B.** The business manager of District B felt that the only disadvantage in sharing a superintendent with District A was the fact that there was more responsibility placed on the business manager as a result, mainly in areas such as state reporting and communication with state officials on budgetary matters. She provided a lengthy list of these additional reporting responsibilities which included grants, federal Title, and state special education reporting. The question of whether the shared superintendent situation assisted or hampered progress toward district goals yielded only a response that in her opinion it did not hamper progress.

When asked about the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader, she offered only that it did not impact that aspect negatively, but also indicated that at most she is peripherally aware of instructional matters. However, when asked about the impact on the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager, she asserted that the sharing situation cannot work if the superintendent is a micromanager – he or she
must trust their employees to do their jobs and must collaborate with them on an as
needed basis

It is apparent that neither of the business managers in Districts A or B feel they
are personally impacted by any new challenges faced by the superintendent in regards to
instructional leader. As things affect them, he has the time for them that they need, and
the added help and support of their companion business managers more than makes up
for any perceived loss of time or contact that they would have with a superintendent in a
traditional setting

**Shared superintendent in districts A and B** Interestingly, the shared
superintendent in Districts A and B was able to cite more disadvantages to the sharing
situation than either the principals or the business manager. Probably the most poignant
of these for this superintendent was that fact that he felt it was much more difficult to get
as close to or involved with the students and their activities as he would like. This has
been a significant disappointment to him as he approaches the end of his distinguished
career in education. In conjunction with the business manager of District A, he also cited
the problem of trying to be visible in all the communities he serves. Over time, he
believes this has become less and less of an issue as the expectations of community
members have changed over the years as they have gotten used to the arrangement. The
superintendent also believes that it is a disadvantage that his time and attention is split,
but that problem is counterbalanced by the fact that the fact that he is shared allows both
districts to have full time principals in each of their buildings. Finally, he said that having
two board meetings a month is more challenging than one might think. It is not as easy as changing the name at the top of the agenda, often the districts are doing very different things, so it really is a case of the work of a traditional superintendent being doubled.

The shared superintendent feels that it depends on how things are set up as to whether district goals are assisted or hampered by the sharing arrangement. In the case of Districts A and B, he believes that the progress is assisted because of both districts’ abilities to collaborate and the fact that they have similar goals. He also mentioned that because he has been able to work with the respective boards to strengthen finances in both districts over time, they both get to focus on their goals rather than on financial issues.

It was obviously uncomfortable for this superintendent to talk about his personal effectiveness as an educational leader, but he would obviously have been flattered by the views of the other people interviewed in District A and B. The only comment he would make on the question was, "The superintendent has to be an educational leader (in this situation) because the principals are managers most of the time and the superintendent can see the big picture."

He was more comfortable speaking about the management role of the shared superintendent when he was asked about the effectiveness as a manager, putting much credit for the success of that aspect of the arrangement on the others in the district. He believes that it is crucial that the shared superintendent not try to micromanage. He advises making sure that the right people are in the right positions and that they clearly
understand their roles and responsibilities. Each person must also be able to be positioned to utilize his or her strengths. The superintendent cannot be tied down or responsible for dealing with day-to-day issues or annoyances. A final critical component to the success of the management of the district according to the superintendent was careful long-term planning. With all the needs for things such as building maintenance and improvement, vehicle acquisition and replacement, and new construction, the five-year plans in both districts serve as excellent guides for keeping both districts on track with needs and fiscally sound.

Board president of district B The board president of District B could only cite two disadvantages to the shared superintendent arrangement, both of which can be qualified as speculative. One was that she felt that the arrangement had to naturally place more pressure on the principals of both districts, but she was unable to recall any specific incidents when this had been a problem in District B. She also questioned whether this arrangement puts “too much responsibility” on the superintendent, even though he says that it does not. She believes part of her responsibility is to constantly check with him to make sure he is not over-stressed.

Whereas most respondents in Districts A and B were neutral on the question, the District B’s board president was adamant that this shared superintendent arrangement assists progress toward district goals. She stated that in their arrangement, each district has been able to maintain its own identity, an aspect that is very important to the stakeholders in District B. Even so, they get the best of both worlds in that even though
the districts are clearly separate, the superintendent contact gives them the ability to learn from one another and to take similar directions toward their respective goals.

Unlike the board president in District A, the board president in District B felt the sharing arrangement had actually promoted the superintendent’s abilities to perform as an instructional leader and a manager. The current superintendent’s ability and expertise in delegating the right work to strong building principals gives them the autonomy they need to do their jobs well. He sets expectations that are both clear and high, and his positive leadership style is successful in “lifting folks up” to the best work that they are capable of achieving.

Research Question #3 Have the Lessons Learned from the Prior Research been Heeded over the Last Two Decades?

According to the research done by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) one of the main concerns was the excessive overload that was being placed on the person attempting to perform the task. In some cases the workload was being doubled while the amount of time needed to focus on the work was being halved, creating decreased job satisfaction and eventual “burn out” in even the most motivated individuals. Secondary concerns revolved around the natural loss of relationship-building necessary to be an effective leader, lack of visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position.
As outlined in Chapter 1, five interview questions were designed to help arrive at the answer to this question of whether the lessons outlined by the prior research are being heeded.

1. What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered?
2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
5. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

In synthesizing the responses to these interview questions in relation to Research Question #3, a special emphasis has been placed on respondents’ answers to the third interview question listed, since parts of the other four interview questions have been analyzed previously in this case study. Work overload, relationship-building, visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position are the issues focused on in the following analysis.

Principals in District B. The two principals in District B were in general agreement with their partner principals in District A that, although extremely busy all of the time and always productive, it was their perception that the superintendent’s work load was
manageable. As with District A, it was apparent to the researcher that the superintendent was able to work a reasonable schedule due to two main reasons: his ability to delegate tasks to the people in District B best able to handle those tasks, and the experience and enthusiasm of those people to be able to complete those tasks in an exceptional manner.

This also addressed another issue emphasized by the Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) research in regards to loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. This shared superintendent has been quite savvy in choosing which responsibilities to delegate and which to retain. In so doing, he has indeed given up some personal control over daily responsibilities, but that has been purposeful and has made good sense in consideration of all the circumstances. Therefore, he is not grieving over the loss of that control, since it was his decision to give that up.

As was the case with District A, the principals had quite a bit to contribute to this study concerning the interview question: how does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community? This question was designed to get answers to the issues raised by the previous research regarding the loss of relationship-building thought necessary to be a successful leader and the natural lack of visibility at events that will occur when the superintendent is shared.

Interestingly, the two principals in District B really felt that it was their responsibility to be relationship-builders and visible at events much more than the superintendent’s. They gave this superintendent a great deal of credit for being present at
activities as asked and “popping in and out pretty frequently” of most other events. However, in District B most school and community events are attended by either the respective principal or the athletic director. Neither principal indicated that this was any kind of hardship for them, in fact, if anything they seemed to feel that this was a very good arrangement for all involved. They did offer two pieces of advice: the shared superintendent should know who is important in each community and work to build those relationships, and boards need to be understanding of the situation and have concrete and shared expectations for exactly the role they expect the superintendent to play when it comes to community issues.

Overall, they would very much agree with their partner principals in District A that handling these issues of relationship-building and visibility in this manner is a logical, natural, and reasonable trade for all the advantages that the shared superintendent arrangement offers.

Business manager of District B. The business manager of District B in her answer to the interview question regarding the disadvantages of sharing the superintendent had noted only the extra workload that had been placed upon the business managers as a result of this situation. However, when asked the interview question, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?” she concurred with other respondents that this is the weakest area of the arrangement, “Because it is impossible to be at everything in both places.” However, she qualified this by saying, “But he tries, here the principal is
placed in that role.” As with the business manager in District A, the business manager in District B feels that the board members in her district are very good about coming to the superintendent’s defense when this issue is discussed in the community, and that both the board and community are understanding and comfortable with the current situation. She also concurred with the principals’ point of view that, although always busy, the superintendent does not seem over-burdened by his workload and seldom shows signs of stress. His ability to delegate work and trust that it will be done well has helped make this situation workable over time.

**Shared superintendent in districts A and B** Although the superintendent shared by Districts A and B was not as exacting as the principals as to what steps need to be taken to address the concern of relationship-building with the external community and the natural lessening of visibility at events, he did concur with some of the things they said when asked how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community. For example, he does make a good effort to try to attend all the big events, especially those held during the school day and those that focus on academics. But he purposefully does not belong to any community service groups because to do so holds the real risk of creating unnecessary tension between communities. The superintendent believes that community members understand that “You have to be where you have to be,” and that a diminished community visibility is the tradeoff for two healthy school districts. It does bother him that he cannot participate in some of those service groups, but to do so could upset a hard fought balance among the communities served by this arrangement.
At no time during the interview did the shared superintendent complain of an excessive workload or a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. He seemed to feel that the pressures and stress he feels are no different than those of his peers and are seldom if ever a result of being shared between two districts. Whenever he could, he gave credit for what was being accomplished to the efforts and expertise of the people he works with.

Board president of district B. In agreement with the board president of District A, there was no indication during the interview of the board president of District B that she felt the shared superintendent was pressured or stressed abnormally due to the responsibility of being the executive leader of multiple districts. Interestingly, in the Meyer (1990) research, this was a disconnect between the board presidents and the shared superintendents, the superintendents felt that the shared superintendent arrangement added much more to their stress than the board presidents did. In District B, even when interviewed independently, it is apparent that both the board president and the superintendent agree that the pressure and stress has been minimized due to efforts on everyone’s part to make this work for the benefit of the students of both districts.

District B’s board president actually credited the superintendent’s decision to live outside both districts as a benefit to this situation. Community groups have not pressured him to become overly involved, simply because he is not a community member. There is also no “jealousy” between communities in thinking that he is more involved in one than the others. What on the surface would seem like a huge negative – the superintendent not
Research Question #4  Are There Any New Challenges Facing Superintendents Today?

As with Research Question #3, there were five interview questions designed to answer Research Question #4  Are there any new challenges facing superintendents today? The five interview questions were

1  What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2  Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
3  Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
4  How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
5  How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

Although none of these five interview questions specifically addresses the research question, the researcher used the respondents' answers to these questions combined with the historical view of a superintendent provided through the Review of Literature in Chapter 2 to arrive at the following conclusions from the following groups

Principals in district B  If asked the direct question, the two principals in District B would most likely agree with their counterparts in District A that the shared
superintendent situation that has developed between their district and District A has elements of the classical view of a superintendent from twenty years ago, combined with the new expectations that stakeholders hold of their educational leader

As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, 20 years ago, the school superintendent’s role was viewed as more of a manager than a leader. In his book *Leading Change*, Kotter (1996) provides a clear differentiation between these two roles. According to Kotter, “Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving” (p. 25). He goes on to write that the product of management is, “A degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stakeholders” (p. 25). These were the skills and abilities that were expected of school superintendents two decades ago, and the results are in line with what Kotter outlines — predictability and order.

Kotter contrasts this with the following description of leadership, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (p. 25). He believes that the product of leadership is, “Change – often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change” (p. 26). As noted in Chapter 2, although stakeholders still demand all the aspects of management, today they also want the advantages that leadership can provide.
Also in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Daft (2005) points out direct contrasts between what he terms ‘the old paradigm’ and ‘the new paradigm,’ calling this the “new reality for leadership” (p 8). The old paradigm focused on stability and control; the new paradigm calls for change, crisis management, and empowerment. Whereas the old paradigm of leadership was about uniformity and could be self-centered, it is the expectation that today’s leaders be focused on collaboration, diversity, and a higher purpose.

Therefore, the new challenges facing school leaders today include visioning, persuading stakeholders to support that vision, inspiring change to happen despite the obstacles, managing crises, and empowering diverse groups to collaborate toward a higher purpose.

Elements of all of these new challenges are evident in the remarks made by the two principals in District B regarding their shared superintendent situation. For example, a vision in District B that had been recently initiated at the time of the interviews was a multi-million dollar construction project at the 6-12 building. As with District A’s one-to-one initiative, just finding the resources to support this vision took persuasion on the part of the superintendent, as it would have been a challenge for some people to justify the value of the cost of this construction. Change was inspired, as learning had to continue to occur while construction was going on and students and classes were being shuffled. Crises were managed as there were the normal problems associated with new construction. But after a short time all groups were able to collaborate toward this higher
purpose and now the stakeholders of District B have a learning environment of which they can be very proud.

In general, the two principals of District B would agree with the three principals of District A and would recommend a shared superintendent concept to face these new challenges of leadership. Like their counterparts, they understand the reality that the financial pressures place on the number of leaders that a district can support, this combined with their belief that there are fewer quality superintendents available to fill positions makes them think that this arrangement is very workable. They all believe that a shared superintendent model with a principal dedicated to each building is far superior to a model where a superintendent is not shared with another district but serves an additional role in the district, such as an elementary principal.

One of the principals in District B did add an important caveat, however. That principal said that in his opinion it would be "very difficult" for a new (beginning) superintendent to come into a shared situation and face these new challenges of leadership. Even with community understanding of the arrangement, there are still contacts and relationships that need to be built in the community, when that is combined with just learning the nuances of being a superintendent, he feels that would be too overwhelming for one person. Districts A and B have struck a hard-earned balance over many years, it will probably take someone who is already familiar with being a superintendent to be able to manage everything needed to be successful in this unique situation.
Business manager of district B. In conjunction with the two principals in District B and her partner business manager in District A, the business manager of District B would agree that the new challenges as outlined by the research are indeed true of the current view of the superintendent position, and that a shared superintendent can meet these new challenges under the right conditions. She cited the example above of District B’s construction project as an excellent illustration of how the district is visionary and progressive.

She would also strongly agree with the other business manager that it would be critical that the sharing districts employ separate business managers, and that those business managers have an extremely close working relationship, providing the checks and balances that each needs to make sure they stay proactive in their challenging positions. When asked if she would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement, she immediately said that she would, as long as everyone’s roles were explicit.

Shared superintendent of districts A and B. The superintendent shared by Districts A and B brought an interesting perspective to this research question concerning the new challenges faced by superintendents today. Prior to becoming the shared superintendent in this situation, he had served as a superintendent of a single district. He believes that the new challenges really do not have much to do with the additional responsibilities of serving multiple districts as their executive leader. Instead, they have more to do with increasing expectations placed on districts by state and federal lawmakers. Mandated
initiatives such as compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the state of Iowa’s Core Curriculum are the greatest contributors to additional work for district executive leaders. Although the No Child Left Behind Act had been recently passed when he began his tenure at Districts A and B, no one at the time was aware of the additional work and reporting that would bring to districts. From his point of view, the reporting is constantly being added to, with no consideration given to reducing or deleting antiquated reporting.

To handle these new challenges, he forces himself to maintain a laser-like focus on the issues that have the biggest impact on the district. He admits to having no problem “farming out” compliance reporting to other people in the district when he knows that they will do solid work with that reporting, with a careful eye toward whether in the process of relieving a burden from his work he is not overburdening someone else.

The shared superintendent would agree with the principals and the business managers in that he would recommend this arrangement, but he also has some caveats. He believes that this will only work well if there are strong leadership teams in place in both districts and if both business managers are experienced and highly qualified. He commented, “The superintendent needs to see the big picture and understand that others in the organization are capable of completing tasks. Proper delegation is the key.”

Board president of district B. The board president of District B had served on the school board for almost a decade at the time of the interview, therefore, she had the historical experience necessary to help with this research question. The current challenges
that she sees the superintendent face seem greater as the years go on, and she admits to being concerned at times that they are too reliant on him and placing too much responsibility on him. However, when asked if she would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement she did not come right out and say that she would recommend it, counter to almost everyone else that was interviewed in case studies one and two. Instead, she was adamant that even before considering it, a quality administrative team needs to be in place and both districts absolutely need to have similar expectations for this to have a chance to work. It was clear that she felt that the shared situation that her district had been able to forge with District A was somewhat unique and that it was not automatic that it would work well in all situations.

Research Question #5: What Impact on the Roles of District Leaders, if any, has Resulted from the Decision to Share a Superintendent?

As outlined in Chapter 1, six interview questions were designed to answer this research question. The interview questions were:

1. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
2. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?
4 How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?

5 What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee’s role as the result of the decision to share a superintendent?

6 How does the added work load, if any, factor into the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the interviewee?

The focus of the following summarization of the findings on this research question will be on respondents’ answers to the last three interview questions listed above, as they pertain most directly to the research question. Information from the first three interview questions will be added peripherally on an “as needed” basis for clarification and elaboration.

**Principals in district B.** Like their counterparts in District A, the principals of District B had much to contribute when asked, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” It was clear from their comments that the quality and quantity of communication was viewed as critical to making sure the district was running smoothly. Following are areas of agreement from all principals affected by this sharing agreement on this interview question:

1 Constant contact between the superintendent and district leaders is critical.

2 The superintendent is always easily reachable, both board secretaries always know where he is and how he can be contacted.
"Face" time is important, this superintendent does a "good job" getting to all the district buildings on a regular basis.

No one thinks twice about calling the superintendent in an emergency, he is always gracious and never irritated by these "interruptions".

E-mails and phone calls become the main forms of communication.

Need to schedule an appointment for a face-to-face conversation when he is not scheduled to be in District B.

One additional point noted by the beginning principal in District B was a desire for more mentoring time, expressing a desire for "someone to vent to when needed". However, he also noted that the superintendent is always available to him when he needs him and when he asks, in reflection, the principal felt like maybe he just needed to get better at asking for support and advice.

It was obvious to the researcher that what makes the communication work so well in both districts is the respect that the principals have for the superintendent and his time constraints, and vice versa. All parties are very conscientious about making every attempt to handle a problem or issue themselves before calling and "bothering" someone else. The principals made no mention of relying on each other for help and advice, although this almost certainly happens. However, a barrier to this is the fact that each is in a separate building, with many located at least 10 miles away from each other.

When asked, "What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee's role as a result of the decision to share a superintendent?" the beginning
principal in District B said that he did not feel that any additional responsibilities were a function of having a shared superintendent. Rather, they were more a function of the small size of the district. However, the other principal in District B, who had begun his work in the district just prior to the beginning of the sharing arrangement, felt that he was still doing some “leftover” work from when he had to serve as a pseudo-superintendent after the terminated superintendent was fired. He offered the following as examples of responsibilities that had been added as a result:

1. Increased responsibility for Basic Educational Data Survey
2. District’s Allowable Growth and At-Risk Reports (School Budget Review Committee reports done in conjunction with the business manager)
3. Much of the reporting on the EdInfo website
4. Community engagement, becoming the “face of the district”

Like their counterparts in District A, neither felt like they were doing an excess of reporting, and neither felt that they were doing additional reporting than what they understood their peers to be doing in districts that were not sharing a superintendent. Not one of the five principals ever complained about an excessive workload or seemed upset about their job responsibilities as a result of the sharing situation.

Finally, when asked if the additional workload factored into their effectiveness and job satisfaction, one principal in District B echoed a comment made by a principal in District A in that it actually increased job satisfaction. With the added responsibilities had come a feeling of being an important part of the district as a whole, when that was joined
with the pride that came with meeting all the obligations of the increased demands, it was a powerful combination that led to a great satisfaction of his role in all that was being accomplished. He appreciated the extra compensation that came with the extra responsibilities, felt that he was working with a board who was supportive and understanding, and he enjoyed being busy. The other principal in District B also said that he was “completely satisfied” with the arrangement and only expressed some anxiety as to whether they would be able to find a replacement who could do all the things that the current shared superintendent does.

**Business manager of district B.** As was the case with all principals and her partner business manager in District A, the business manager of District B had much to offer regarding the interview question, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” She agreed with others’ observations that he is always available and accessible, and that he is very good about letting both board secretaries know his schedule and trusts their ability to communicate it to others. She also commented on this shared superintendent’s ability to be visible in her district almost every day, but noted that at times it is hard for him to remember what information has been relayed to which district and that District A is usually more knowledgeable about his schedule and availability than the people in District B.

Unlike the business manager of District A, the business manager of District B felt that many additional responsibilities have been added to her position as a result of sharing
a superintendent with District A and provided a lengthy list which included American
Renovation and Recovery Act reporting, grant writing, the certified annual report, special
education reporting, payroll, accounts payable, state school budget review committee
applications and federal Title reporting. She mentioned that she does her best to keep up
with everything but is careful to run everything past the superintendent for verification.
Her feeling of job satisfaction was not as strong as others interviewed in Districts A and
B, even though she echoed District A’s business manager in that the current
superintendent provides a great deal of positive reinforcement and lets everyone know
that they are appreciated. Instead, she feels high stress levels at times with all of the
reporting and responsibilities, but she also qualified this by saying that she did not feel
this had anything to do with the shared superintendent situation and that it had more to do
with her job description.

**Shared superintendent of districts A and B.** When asked about how the sharing
arrangement impacts the communication between the superintendent and other district
leaders, the superintendent shared between Districts A and B was able to provide a great
deal of insight into the techniques he uses to make sure that all stakeholders feel they are
communicated with constantly. For example, he makes every effort to be in each building
at least once per week – this involves five buildings among the two districts he leads. He
also makes every effort to contact each building principal on a daily basis. He
understands that they know that he is always available to them, but he feels it is critical to
show this through these kinds of actions. The superintendent also offers to help building
leaders get better, is supportive, and lets them know that he can empathize with the work they are doing and that he always “has their back.”

It is obvious that his additional responsibilities as a result of this arrangement have, in effect, doubled, but he was fully aware that this would be true when he accepted the position and has embraced this as a challenge. As the situation has evolved through the years, his work has essentially worked its way to “manageable” status as he has expertly focused on the most important aspects of being a superintendent in multiple districts and delegated other responsibilities to those in the organization most capable of handling them. This ability to do outstanding work in a seemingly virtually impossible situation has provided him with a great deal of job satisfaction. He suggests that no one should be afraid to consider taking on this type of arrangement, but they need to be prepared for being constantly busy, for much more travel than most superintendents, and for the extra organization that by necessity is involved in making this work so well for everyone involved. He commented, “I love what I do, and I am very proud of what I have done.”

Board president of district B. The board president of District B did not indicate that the sharing situation had any kind of negative impact when it comes to communication between the superintendent and district leaders. She cited his approachability, the ease with which she can contact him, and his willingness to answer questions and his ability to answer them well on all matters as strengths.
When asked about possible additional responsibilities, the board president of District B said that none had been added to her plate, but did note that this might be different if it was someone else besides the current superintendent. Like her counterpart in District A, she did mention that this sharing situation was adding some additional work regarding the upcoming superintendent search that needed to be done in an effort to replace the retiring superintendent. In traditional cases, this would be a daunting task, but in this case, since the two districts have agreed to search for an individual who can continue to be shared between districts, the needs of two different districts and learning communities must be taken into consideration.

Case Study #3 District C

At the time of the interviews, District C served approximately 1,125 students and held the original contract of the superintendent when they entered a sharing agreement in 2004. The District they shared a superintendent with, District D is contiguous to District C and served approximately 235 students.

As with Districts A and B, the sharing agreement began as a result of difficulties that one district was experiencing—this time the key issue was declining enrollment. District D had experienced a drastic drop in students served between 1998 and 2002. In the fall of 2003, a majority of the board was newly elected, and it was shortly after that board election that the board decided to enter into a whole grade sharing agreement with District C beginning in the fall of 2004. Although the decision seemed sudden to some, this was a concept that had been discussed for years, District C was offering some very
attractive incentives, and the newly elected board in District D felt that their election was a mandate from the community to move this direction. The superintendent of District D did not agree with that decision and subsequently she did not stay in her capacity through the end of her contract. District D then brought in an interim to finish the year. During that time, board members of District D had a chance to begin working closely with the superintendent of District C, were impressed by his abilities as a school leader, decided that he had the capacity to represent their district in a fair and equitable manner and, beginning in 2004, began to share this superintendent with District C. That same superintendent has been in that position since the whole grade sharing agreement began in July of 2004 and was beginning his seventh year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Whereas Districts A and B employed a “pure” shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing, Districts C and D have a great amount of whole grade sharing. District C sends its sixth grade students to District D, and District D sends its seventh through twelfth grade students to District C. It is important to note that the whole grade sharing concept does not necessarily lead to a shared superintendent decision. Many districts that whole grade share retain a separate superintendent, the most likely reasons for this are separate superintendents allow districts to maintain some autonomy, while at the same time assuring that each is represented fully in the whole grade sharing arrangement.
District C employs a high school principal (grades 9-12), a middle school principal (grades 7-8), an intermediate principal (grades 3-5) and an elementary principal (grades PK-2). Each of these positions is full time. District C also has a full time Director of Facilities and Maintenance who is shared with District D, a full time Business Manager, and a shared Director of Transportation with District D. As with all districts in Iowa, board members are elected by vote of the school district community, the Board President of District C was then elected to that position through a vote of the board members of District C. Following is a summary of their comments as obtained by the interview questions and as they pertain to the research questions.

Research Question #1. What are the Motives for the decision by Districts to Share Superintendents?

As outlined in Chapter 1, answers to this research question were gathered through
the use of three interview questions:

1. What was the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent?
2. What similarities should be in place before this arrangement is considered?
3. What advantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?

Principals in district C. Two of the four principals in District C were actually in their current positions when the decision was made to share a superintendent with District D back in the fall of 2004, so they had a very distinct collective recollection of why this decision was made. They both verified that it began as an effort to help a neighboring district stay viable as they dealt with severe declining enrollment issues. Their
recollection was that it seemed to make sense to everyone in District C that the people in District D would want to share their superintendent due to his abilities and talents and the sharing incentives that were being offered by the state of Iowa at the time. Just like in the previous case studies, the shared superintendent concept seemed to instantly work well for both districts, once it was proven to District D that they would receive the equitable services that they were promised. The other principals in District C, who were not employed in the district at the time, could only speculate that the rationale to share a superintendent was based on financial reasons, the fact that District D only had an interim superintendent at the time of the decision, and the fact that the districts were already whole grade sharing.

The second interview question intended to help provide answers to research question #1 asks respondents, based on their current experiences, to speculate what similarities need to be in place before considering this type of shared leadership arrangement. Following is a summary list of the things that the four principals in District C suggested:

1. All stakeholders from both districts need to be involved in the decision-making.
2. Both districts need to have identical or, at least similar school calendars.
3. Both districts need to have similar professional development initiatives.
4. Both districts need to have similar standards and benchmarks.
5. They both must have a common vision and goals.
6. The superintendent must be supported by the leaders of both districts.
The four principals in District C were able to cite numerous advantages to this type of shared arrangement. These included:

1. More people to “bounce ideas off”
2. There is a larger resource pool of both materials and human capital for initiatives with the capacity to build stronger relationships.
3. Better communication and administrative collaboration.
4. Increased capacity to explore other ways of doing things in an effort to find consistency.
5. Financial incentives provided both districts opportunities for resources that they would not otherwise have.
6. More cohesive goals for both districts.

*Business manager in district C.* The business manager for District C had served the district in that capacity for 22 years at the time of the interview, so she had many years of experience in the district before the whole grade sharing and subsequent shared superintendent arrangements began. In her opinion, one of the main reasons that District C was so interested in this opportunity was because they had always been altruistic, looking to help other districts by sharing in any way possible. She also agreed that the financial incentives were attractive and that those had been a great help to both districts’ financial stability over time. Two additional reasons for sharing a superintendent that she noted were the fact that the districts are so close in vicinity to each other, and the fact that
they had already agreed to whole grade share at the time that they decided to share the superintendent

When asked what similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered, she focused more on the qualities needed by the shared superintendent to make this arrangement work, citing an important quality as having the ability to work with two different boards and keep them on “separate pages” by cheerleading for both without putting the other one off. Other qualities that she cited will be listed as part of the summary in Chapter 5.

In regards to advantages from her view in sharing a superintendent, District C’s business manager listed two items: the fact that she has a “sister” business manager in the neighboring district to compare notes and procedures, and that this arrangement has many financial benefits when the saving and incentives are combined.

**Shared superintendent in districts C and D.** The shared superintendent between Districts C and D had been serving as the superintendent of District C for five years prior to the time that the opportunity to share became available, so, like the superintendent of Districts A and B, he brought with him the experience needed to undertake this challenge. Furthermore, since he had everything running smoothly in District C, when the sharing began he was positioned to invest the time needed to have an immediate positive impact in District D. In fact, it should be noted that he saw with clarity the advantages of the arrangement long before members of District D, and even long before members of his own community. Part of his foresight came from the fact that his ties to community C,
and therefore his proximity to community D, extended back to his own school years, as he is a graduate of District C. For years, he had been extending overtures to District D that revolved around the idea that District C was always available and willing to help in any way and at any time District D was ready. With the new board sworn in during the fall of 2003, it was finally time for District D to make those kinds of decisions.

When asked Interview Question #1, the shared superintendent confirmed that it was a combination of sudden declining enrollment, proximity, and the strong desire for quality, consistent leadership that finally encouraged District D to agree to share the superintendent with District C. By the time he began his tenure as the superintendent of both districts, the financial incentives and the savings that were occurring were already being penciled in as important considerations of both districts’ budgeting practices. He was also able to address and ease the concern that members of District D had that they would be somewhat ignored and treated as “second class.” Even though their District had fallen on hard times, with good reason they were very proud of their history and the education that they were able to provide their children and they did not want to see that discounted or fall by the wayside. In short order, they realized that was not going to happen with this outstanding educational leader, he recognized and honored their concerns and through his actions dissolved any worries they had in this regard.

Unlike the superintendent of Districts A and B, who had a lengthy list of similarities that he felt should be in place before a sharing arrangement should be considered, the superintendent of Districts C and D noted nothing beyond the fact that
proximity is important. Perhaps this is because District C and D are about as dissimilar as two districts can be in Iowa, with the only notable commonality being the border they share. For example, District D educated about 5 times as many students as District C at the time of the interviews, District C had four principals whereas District D had one, and District C was able to offer a very comprehensive menu of extracurricular offerings whereas District D was unable to even field some of the more traditional offerings such as football and wrestling. This raises an important point whereas the superintendent of Districts A and B felt strongly that many similarities should be place between the districts, the superintendent of Districts C and D did not share that belief. Their experiences and accomplishments would suggest that they are both correct.

The shared superintendent of Districts C and D did have some considerations in his answer to the third interview question regarding the advantages to be found in sharing a superintendent. For example, he spoke of efficiencies of continuity, such as similar board policies, personnel contracts, professional development, curriculum, and state and federal reporting. He also felt that this gave the districts opportunities to learn from each other and to have a collaborative better handle on “big picture” ideas in education, accelerating their growth as cooperative entities and, in so doing, advantaging their respective students.

Although he did not speak specifically of this as an advantage, it is apparent that both districts, like Districts A and B, are taking advantage of the financial savings beyond the obvious ones provided by the sharing arrangement. To illustrate, the state of Iowa
provided, at the time of the interviews, additional savings to districts beyond those of sharing a superintendent, such as sharing a transportation director and a director of facilities and maintenance. Because of the partnerships already in place Districts C and D, when this opportunity became available they were able to take advantage of this opportunity immediately.

Board president of district C. The board president of District C had been a long time community and school board member at the time of the interview and therefore had some historical insight to offer when asked about the rationale behind the decision to share the superintendent. He recalled that there were some economics that factored into the decision, but that it mainly grew out of the fact that they had already made the decision to whole grade share with District D and they wanted to use this opportunity to cement the relationship. He also saw this as a clear chance for District C to provide some altruistic outreach and help a struggling neighbor. Sharing their leader, who was highly regarded both in their community and across the state, seemed to be a small price to pay to help the students and community of District D.

He did not have much to contribute toward the answer to the second interview question, but his comment is noteworthy to this study when talking about what similarities should be in place before this arrangement is considered. He said that boards and communities must have similar expectations of the superintendent. He also recalled that there was some work that needed to be done with members of his own learning community in that they did not want to left with “one half of a superintendent.”
However, like many others, he was effusive in responding to the questions about what advantages had been found in sharing a superintendent, saying that communication between districts was greatly increased, which is critical to the success of a whole grade sharing arrangement. Sharing a superintendent encouraged districts to represent themselves in a much better manner and fashion to each other. The board president also said that an important advantage has been the alignment of expectations for staff members and uniformity across both districts. He believes that this has increased the ability of students to achieve successfully in both districts.

**Other supervisors in districts C and D.** The researcher was able to interview two additional supervisors, both of which were shared between Districts C and D. The director of facilities and maintenance (similar to the director of buildings and grounds position in District A), who incidentally was the mayor of the town where District D’s school was located, and the transportation director, who had been with District C for 4 years and had, just the year before, become the shared transportation director with District D.

When asked about the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent, the director of buildings and grounds mentioned the budget as the primary reason. He also mentioned the small size of District D as a factor, along with the fact that they were adjoining districts. Because he had only been in the district for four years, and had spent many of the prior years on the road as a truck driver, the transportation director had no knowledge of why the districts decided to share a superintendent and really could not even speculate.
Neither had lengthy answers to the second interview question regarding similarities between districts that should be in place, but the director of buildings and grounds did say that it was his impression that the students in both communities “got along” and that was an important factor, especially since it was his recollection that some parents in both communities did not support the original effort to share a superintendent.

In answering the third interview question, an advantage noted by the transportation director was that consistency of policy was helpful, saying that in his area is it very helpful that policies in both districts are the same in regards to bus conduct and discipline. He also felt very supported by this particular superintendent when there are issues. The director of facilities and management indicated that since he was shared between Districts C and D as well, he appreciated that there was only one person he needed to track down when he wanted to talk about a situation that warranted person-to-person contact.

Research Question #2  Do Shared Superintendents Face Similar Challenges as Their Counterparts from 20 Years Ago?

As outlined in Chapter 1, four interview questions were utilized to gather answers to this research question.

1. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
4 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

**Principals in district C.** The three principals in District C who had worked in this situation for multiple years had difficulties coming up with disadvantages in sharing a superintendent. The only thing mentioned was that sometimes they had to make one more call than they normally would to get hold of the superintendent, but also qualified that this was “not a big deal.” If anything, they felt that it was much harder on the shared superintendent than on them, saying that they surmised that he was constantly struggling to make sure that he did not prioritize one district over another, and that the drag on his time must be a challenge with two board meetings, two sets of policies, and so on.

However, the fourth principal, who was in his first year in the district, felt that there were multiple disadvantages with this arrangement, but seemed to be speaking more about the whole grade sharing arrangement than the shared superintendent situation when he cited the following: the administrator from District D is not at events to supervise as often as he thinks she should be, and in general they have not been able to forge a “strong relationship,” communicating only in monthly meetings. When specifically asked about the shared superintendent situation, he did say that he felt that it led to an inability to get to know the students on a more personal basis.

When asked if sharing a superintendent assists or hampers progress toward district goals, two of the four principals felt that it assists progress because it provided more opportunities to collaborate with additional administrators. One of the other
principals felt that, in given the choices of the question, they would choose a third option, which was that it does neither. The fourth principal felt that it actually hampered progress because the sensitivity between the two communities kept the districts from moving forward like they could if they were not sharing the superintendent.

When their answers were combined, the four principals in District C had an extensive list in ways in which the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader:

1. He enhances the ability to collaborate and share ideas between districts.
2. A larger group of constituents (administrators, students, teachers) leads to a larger pool of ideas from which to draw.
3. The leadership teams of both districts are brought together monthly to compare progress and discuss ideas, allowing for continuity between districts.
4. There is a constant push to “ratchet up” instructional goals.
5. The superintendent finds a way to be visible in all the buildings, including a once-per-week walk through of each site.
6. He takes an active role in leadership opportunities.
7. When professional development is separated among buildings in both districts, the superintendent makes an effort to at least “pop in” to each one.

The four principals had a shorter list of answers when asked how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager, focusing mostly on his skill set when they commented that his visibility in the communities and
the buildings and the trust people have for him allow him to manage exceptionally. They also agreed that his ability to empower other supervisors (buildings and grounds, transportation, food service, finance) and not micro-manage rather than having to take care of it all himself makes the management aspect of the arrangement workable.

**Business manager of district C.** Although the business manager of District C felt that there were no problems for her personally in working in the shared superintendent situation, she did stress that if the superintendent was not as organized as the current shared superintendent of Districts C and D, this arrangement could be very challenging. Unique to their situation, she also felt that it was a disadvantage that some in District D may have the impression that, since there has been no move to merge or consolidate the districts, that the current status of whole grade sharing may be perpetual. In other words, because the shared superintendent is doing such great work, the path to a future merger may be more challenging.

As with many respondents, the question of whether the shared superintendent situation assisted or hampered progress toward district goals led to an “it depends” answer from the business manager of District C. She felt that is was “goal dependent” on whether it assisted or hampered the goals, saying that it assisted in such important areas as financial stability, alignment of curriculum, and providing the best education possible, but if a goal was consolidation, it seemed to hampering those efforts.

The business manager did not have much to contribute to the questions of whether the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as either an
instructional leader or a manager, saying only that it was “positive” and that this superintendent, “Sees the overall picture well and can apply results of situations to both districts”

**Shared superintendent in districts C and D** As in the situation in Districts A and B, the shared superintendent in Districts C and D was able to cite more disadvantages to the sharing situation than either the principals or the business manager. However, it appeared to the researcher that several of them were more analogous to the whole grade sharing arrangement than to the fact that he is shared between two districts. For example, he mentioned that two of the disadvantages came early in the arrangement when the districts were trying to decide issues such as which grades to share, mascots, and school colors. Another very problematic issue was the fact that several of the building principals were opposed to the whole grade sharing agreement, to the point where some of them decided to seek different professional opportunities. If the districts had not also been starting a whole grade sharing agreement at the same time as they were beginning to share a superintendent, these would likely not have been issues. However, the fact that he has been able to overcome the contentiousness that surrounded some of these beginning issues is noteworthy. In regards to non-whole grade sharing disadvantages, the superintendent agrees with the superintendent in Districts A and B in that he believes that it is a disadvantage that his time and attention is split, but that problem is counterbalanced by the fact that the fact that he is shared allows both districts to have full time principals in each of their buildings. Finally, the superintendent of Districts C and D mentioned that several open enrollment issues had been disadvantageous. Specifically, when students
wanted to open enroll from District D to District C the board members and staff of
District D were challenged to support the superintendent in his decision-making, since it
appeared he was favoring one district over the other

The shared superintendent feels that it depends on how things are set up as to
whether district goals are assisted or hampered by the sharing arrangement. The districts
have separate goals, but they are on similar topics. So goals are not hampered, but they
are only assisted by the arrangement to the extent that they are similar in nature

Again, in a marked similarity to the superintendent in Districts A and B, it was
obviously uncomfortable for this superintendent to talk about his personal effectiveness
as an educational leader, but he would obviously have been flattered by the views of the
other people interviewed in District C and D

Another similarity was that he was more comfortable speaking about the
management role of the shared superintendent when he was asked about the effectiveness
as a manager, and he also put much credit for the success of that aspect of the
arrangement on the others in the district. He feels very comfortable delegating
responsibilities to principals, the business managers, and other supervisors and sees his
role as one of support and advocacy for the decisions they make. He also believes that it
is crucial that the shared superintendent be highly organized, a quality that many of the
others interviewed attributed to him. He credits the shared superintendent arrangement
for the luxury of having a principal in each building in both districts and believes that this
is a successful model for student achievement
Board president of district C. From the perspective of the board president of District C, there were no apparent disadvantages to the shared superintendent arrangement, but he did speculate on what he felt the shared superintendent might be going through. Rhetorically, he asked is the superintendent uncomfortable wearing two hats? When what is in the best interests of one district clashes with what is in the best interests of the shared district, how is that reconciled? He stated that he never sees the current superintendent struggle with this, but adds that it must be a disadvantage that arises at least occasionally.

The board president of District C believes that sharing a superintendent definitely assists with progress toward district goals. When budgetary concerns arise, he can look at both districts and give educated suggestions, the sharing of both a director of facilities and management and a director of transportation are examples of this. He believes that this arrangement helps with instructional goals, in his observation, the superintendent, "Pours himself into the administrative team, and they pour themselves into the staff, and they pour themselves into the students," creating excellent educational environments in both districts.

From the board president’s perspective, the sharing arrangement had little effect on the superintendent’s abilities to perform as either an instructional leader or a manager, except to possibly enhance both. In the area of instruction, he noted that because of the arrangement the superintendent is encouraged to consolidate meetings, which allows administration and staff to comingle and collaborate in an efficient manner. This board
president also feels that extracurricular opportunities are important, by whole grade sharing and sharing a superintendent, the students in District D have many opportunities at a variety of activities that they would not have were there no sharing taking place. In the area of management, the board president believes that this sharing arrangement allows the superintendent to see multiple issues as one, citing the example of the decision to share a director of transportation and how that might not have happened had not the superintendent already been shared. On this question, the board president also echoed an observation by the business manager that the current superintendent may be so effective as both a leader and a manager that efforts to merge or consolidate seem to not be part of the current discussion.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. Neither the shared director of facilities and maintenance nor the shared director of transportation in Districts C and D could cite any disadvantages with the shared superintendent arrangement, with the director of transportation saying only that the current superintendent was easy to work with and very supportive. They also did not have responses to the question about whether the sharing arrangement assists or hampers progress toward district goals except that it appeared to the director of facilities and maintenance that the arrangement strengthens both districts.

Regarding the question of instructional leaderships, the director of facilities and maintenance noted only that the superintendent was always there when teachers, principals, and he needed him. The director of transportation concurred that the superintendent “is good at leading teachers.”
They had more to offer when asked about the effect of the sharing agreement on the superintendent's ability to manage the districts, with the director of facilities and maintenance commenting that the superintendent is quite effective as a manager because he trusts his employees, errs on the side of caution when making difficult decisions, and is honest and forthcoming when it comes to issues of the budget. The director of transportation concurred, saying that he displays a great deal of trust in delegating responsibilities to others and is always willing to discuss different points of view.

Research Question #3 Have the Lessons Learned from the Prior Research been Heeded over the Last Two Decades?

According to the research done by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) one of the main concerns was the excessive overload that was being placed on the person attempting to perform the task. In some cases the workload was being doubled while the amount of time needed to focus on the work was being halved, creating decreased job satisfaction and eventual "burn out" in even the most motivated individuals. Secondary concerns revolved around the natural loss of relationship-building necessary to be an effective leader, lack of visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position.

As outlined in Chapter 1, five interview questions were designed to help arrive at the answer to this question of whether the lessons outlined by the prior research are being heeded.
1. What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered?

2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?

3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?

4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?

5. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

In synthesizing the responses to these interview questions in relation to Research Question #3, a special emphasis has been placed on respondents’ answers to the third interview question listed, since parts of the other four interview questions have been analyzed previously in this case study. Work overload, relationship-building, visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position are the issues focused on in the following analysis.

**Principals in district C.** The four principals were in agreement with each other and with the principals in Districts A and B that, although extremely busy all of the time and always productive, it was their perception that the superintendent’s work load was manageable. As with Districts A and B, it was apparent to the researcher that the superintendent was able to work a reasonable schedule due to two main reasons: his ability to delegate tasks to the people in the organization best able to handle those tasks,
and the experience and expertise of those people to be able to complete those tasks in an exceptional manner. In addition, with the exception of the least senior principal in District C, who felt that he should be getting more supervisory help from the principal in District D, the principals in District D did not indicate that they felt personally overburdened by this sharing arrangement.

This also addressed another issue emphasized by the Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) research in regards to loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. Again, just like the superintendent of Districts A and B, this shared superintendent has been quite savvy in choosing which responsibilities to delegate and which to retain, in so doing he has indeed given up some personal control over daily responsibilities, but that has been purposeful and has made good sense in consideration of all the circumstances. Therefore, he is not grieving over the loss of that control, since it was his decision to give that up.

The four principals, concerning the interview question how does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community, were complimentary of the shared superintendent’s ability to meet this challenge. This question was designed to get answers to the issues raised by the previous research regarding the loss of relationship-building thought necessary to be a successful leader and the natural lack of visibility at events that will occur when the superintendent is shared.
They also felt that there was a rather unique element to this issue in that the superintendent is actually from the community where District C is located and graduated from that school. To compound matters, one of the major concerns coming into the sharing arrangement was that some stakeholders in District D, by far the smaller of the two districts, were very concerned about the superintendent's ability to be equitable in his time, attention, and decision-making. But they offered some very specific ways in which he was successfully handling this rather tricky issue from their point of view.

1. The superintendent already has credibility in the community of District C, so he really focuses on taking advantage of opportunities to participate in activities in the community that houses District D.

2. He was present from the beginning of the whole grade sharing process, his efforts on that initiative and the help and support that District C was able to provide District D added to credibility of the arrangement.

3. The fact that the communities are located six miles from each other facilitates his ability to be both aware of and attend events in both communities.

From the principals’ viewpoint, there is no issue of lack of relationship-building and visibility because the superintendent realizes the importance of these and is quite conscientious of doing everything he can to excel in these areas.

Business manager of district C. The business manager of District C in her answer to the interview question regarding the disadvantages of sharing the superintendent had cited the “fact that there was no movement toward consolidation” with District D as one
However, when she responded to the question about how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community, she said that he is excellent in this regard, claiming that he, "Sees, knows, and is involved in both communities." Although these answers would seem to contradict each other, from her answers to follow-up questions it was evident that it was the business manager’s opinion that the shared superintendent was so good at every aspect of the position, including his work to build relationships with both communities, that District D therefore had no real reason to consider consolidation, because they were already getting all the services they need.

**Shared superintendent in districts C and D** The superintendent shared by Districts C and D seemed to just accept the fact that relationship-building with both external communities and visibility in same was part of the job and did not seem at all over-burdened by the amount of time he expended in those efforts. When told about the high regard other respondents had for him in this area and asked how he can make this work, he responded only that it was easier in a whole grade sharing situation because there was only one high school which houses most of the school activities for both communities. This gives him only one site to attend for most events giving him some time efficiencies.

Also, it should be noted that the community that surrounds District D is quite small, this is important in the fact that it puts its effort into a few major events per year, it is clear that the superintendent makes sure that he is making every effort to attend these focused events. There is an additional benefit in that, because District D has so few
events, there are not many competing events for the superintendent to have to choose from, unlike the superintendent in Districts A and B.

As with the superintendent in Districts A and B, at no time during the interview did the shared superintendent of Districts C and D complain of an excessive workload or a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. He also seemed to feel that the pressures and stress he feels are no different than those of his peers and are seldom if ever a result of being shared between two districts. Whenever he could, he gave credit for what was being accomplished to the efforts and expertise of the people he works with. Often, they gave him the credit for being so organized and his willingness and success in delegating responsibilities to others.

Board president of district C. As with interviews with other board presidents in this study, there was no indication during the interview of the board president of District C that he felt the shared superintendent was pressured or stressed abnormally due to the responsibility of being the executive leader of multiple districts. Interestingly, in the Meyer (1990) research, this was a disconnect between the board presidents and the shared superintendents, the superintendents felt that the shared superintendent arrangement added much more to their stress than the board presidents did. In District C, even when interviewed independently, it is apparent that both the board president and the superintendent agree that the pressure and stress has been minimized due to efforts on everyone’s part to make this work for the benefit of the students of both districts. He noted that he was “satisfied” with the superintendent’s visibility in the community and
indicated that the only real issue surrounding this was that his community and that of District D could grow in their abilities in using processes to make collaborative decisions.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. Neither the director of transportation nor the director of facilities and maintenance commented specifically on any noticeable excess stress by the shared superintendent due to a perceived increased workload or due to a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. Instead, they both indicated that he was always available to them for any decision-making that needed to occur, this was critical to their roles, as they were obviously quite busy serving in their positions for both districts. If extra stress was added due to a lack of availability of the superintendent, that would greatly increase their personal job stress.

The director of transportation did not have much to contribute about the effectiveness of the shared superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community, saying only that “He divides his time fairly.” However, the viewpoint of the director of facilities and maintenance was quite interesting as he also served as the mayor of the town where the school in District D is located at the time of the interviews. He was quite effusive in his praise of the work of the superintendent to be visible and involved in his community, saying that the superintendent was always available to meet with parents and the public and that the arrangement is going very well, with the superintendent just as involved in District D’s community as he is in the community of District C. He concluded, “This is important, because he is seen as the superintendent for both communities, not just one.”
Research Question #4 Are There Any New Challenges Facing Superintendents Today?

As with Research Question #3, there were five interview questions designed to answer Research Question #4 Are there any new challenges facing superintendents today? The five interview questions were

1. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
3. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
5. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

Although none of these five interview questions specifically addresses the research question, the researcher used the respondents’ answers to these questions combined with the historical view of a superintendent provided through the Review of Literature in Chapter 2 to arrive at the following conclusions from the following groups

**Principals in district C.** If asked the direct question, the four principals in District C would most likely agree with their counterparts in Districts A and B and suggest that the shared superintendent situation that has developed between their district and their partner district has elements of the classical view of a superintendent from 20 years ago, combined with the new expectations that stakeholders hold of their educational leader.
As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, 20 years ago, the school superintendent's role was viewed as more of a manager than a leader. In his book *Leading Change*, Kotter (1996) provides a clear differentiation between these two roles. According to Kotter, "Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving" (p. 25). He goes on to write that the product of management is, "A degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stakeholders" (p. 25). These were the skills and abilities that were expected of school superintendents two decades ago, and the results are in line with what Kotter outlines: predictability and order.

Kotter contrasts this with the following description of leadership, "Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles" (p. 25). He believes that the product of leadership is, "Change – often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change" (p. 26). As noted in Chapter 2, although stakeholders still demand all the aspects of management, today they also want the advantages that leadership can provide.

Also in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Daft (2005) points out direct contrasts between what he terms ‘the old paradigm’ and ‘the new paradigm,’ calling this the “new reality for leadership” (p. 8). The old paradigm focused on stability and control; the new...
paradigm calls for change, crisis management and empowerment. Whereas the old paradigm of leadership was about uniformity and could be self-centered, it is the expectation that today's leaders be focused on collaboration, diversity, and a higher purpose.

Therefore, the new challenges facing school leaders today include visioning, persuading stakeholders to support that vision, inspiring change to happen despite the obstacles, managing crises, and empowering diverse groups to collaborate toward a higher purpose.

Elements of all of these new challenges are evident in the remarks made by the four principals in District C regarding their shared superintendent situation. The best example to illustrate this is the whole grading sharing initiative. District C had a vision of how they could help a struggling neighboring district, while at the same time create conditions where their own district could get even better. Change was inspired, as communities, school staff, parents, and students had to learn in a very short time period all the collaborative dynamics needed to make this work in the best interests of all. Many crises were managed, as the superintendent noted this spanned from seemingly minor issues such as school colors and mascot all the way to critical decisions such as which grade levels were going to attend which schools. But ultimately all groups were able to collaborate toward this higher purpose and by all internal measures this is working well in both District C and D.
In general, the four principals of District C would agree with their counterparts in Districts A and B in recommending a shared superintendent concept to face these new challenges of leadership. They understand the reality that the financial pressures place on the number of leaders that a district can support, this combined with their belief that there are fewer quality superintendents available to fill positions makes them think that this arrangement is very workable. Like Districts A and B, these principals feel that this shared superintendent model with a principal dedicated to each building is far superior to a model where a superintendent is not shared with another district but serves an additional role in the district, such as an elementary principal.

This support from the principals does come with some caveats, however. Two principals said that compatibility of the two sharing districts is critical to making this work, as the superintendent has to face these new challenges of leadership with two districts, not just one. It was the consensus of the group that this arrangement makes a great deal of sense when districts are whole grade sharing and cast some doubt on the viability of the initiative if the districts were not. Of course, they were not aware of the circumstances of Districts A and B at the time of the interviews and that the arrangement could be successful without any elements of whole grade sharing as evidenced in those other districts.

Business manager of district C. In conjunction with the four principals and her job alike partners in Districts A and B, the business manager would agree that the new challenges as outlined by the research are indeed true of the current view of the
superintendent position, and that a shared superintendent can meet these new challenges under the right conditions. When asked if she would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement, she responded, "Definitely, but it would be person dependent." She feels that person would need to have all the organizational, personal, and competency skills of the current shared superintendent for the arrangement to be viable.

Shared superintendent of districts C and D. The superintendent shared by Districts C and D echoed the unique perspective to this research question concerning the new challenges faced by superintendents today that was raised by the superintendent of Districts A and B. Prior to becoming the shared superintendent in this situation, he had served as a superintendent of District C only, after previously serving that district as its secondary principal. He agrees with the other shared superintendent in this study that the new challenges really do not have much to do with the additional responsibilities of serving multiple districts as their executive leader. Instead, they have more to do with increasing expectations placed on districts by state and federal lawmakers. Mandated initiatives such as compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the state of Iowa's Core Curriculum are the greatest contributors to additional work for district executive leaders.

Unlike the superintendent in Districts A and B, the shared superintendent of Districts C and D does the vast majority of this reporting on his own, not "farming it out" to others such as the principals and business manager. When asked about this, he viewed
this as just "part of getting the job done," and did not view it at an excessive burden. In his opinion, almost all of the reporting of the two districts he leads is quite similar, so once one is done it is really not that much effort to do the same report for the partner district.

It was clear to the researcher that the difference in viewpoint on this important matter is that in Districts A and B there are no elements of whole grade sharing, whereas in Districts C and D the majority of grades are shared. Therefore, when a report is done for District A, for example, the same report in District B would involve a whole new set of circumstances and data. However, when the superintendent of District C does a report, since many of the students are shared, it is often the exact same report for District D. In fact, there would be no extra reporting on the secondary sections of District D, for example, because all of those students are reported with District C's data.

The shared superintendent of Districts C and D would agree with the principals and the business manager in that he would recommend this arrangement, but he also has some caveats. He believes that districts need to question themselves and each other about the duration of the agreement before entering into it and have had meaningful discussions on future partnerships and what this agreement will lead to. He commented, "When things are going well, people are happy, when not, people are unhappy." It is during those "unhappy" times when a tenuous sharing agreement may become stressed.

Board president of District C. The board president of District C had a long history with both the community and the school board at the time of the interview and agreed.
with the others in District C in that there were certainly new challenges facing the superintendent than there had been when he first became involved. He understood how the whole grade sharing agreement added to the challenges of the learning community of District C, but very strongly felt that they were meeting these challenges and that the whole arrangement was in the best interests of everyone involved. He had not seemed to have consciously thought about the extra work this much place on the superintendent when combined with the additional pressures of the position and believed the experience of the interview had given him opportunities for further reflection. However, when asked if he would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement he did say that he would “definitely” recommend it, but he felt that the districts should be whole grade sharing or moving toward that arrangement when considering it.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. Being somewhat removed from the educational aspect of both districts and solely focused on the management aspects, it was to be expected and natural that the director of transportation and the director of facilities and management of Districts C and D would mirror their counterparts in District A and would not have much to contribute to the answer to Research Question #4. The management issues that they deal with on a day-to-day basis, such as vehicle maintenance, weather concerns, building and grounds updates, and so on have been traditionally viewed as items on which they partner with superintendents, no different today than it was 20 years ago.
However, the director of facilities and maintenance would recommend this type of arrangement to others that are considering it, indicating that the cost savings that it provides allows districts more flexibility in their capacity to improve education. The director of transportation, on the other hand, said that he believed that the size of the districts would factor into the decision, indicating that it would take at least one district of substantial size, as in the case of their situation, for it to work.

Research Question #5 What Impact on the Roles of District Leaders, if any, has Resulted from the Decision to Share a Superintendent?

As outlined in Chapter 1, six interview questions were designed to answer this research question. The interview questions were:

1. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
2. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?
5. What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee’s role as the result of the decision to share a superintendent?
6 How does the added work load, if any, factor into the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the interviewee?

The focus of the following summarization of the findings on this research question will be on respondents’ answers to the last three interview questions listed above, as they pertain most directly to the research question. Information from the first three interview questions will be added peripherally on an “as needed” basis for clarification and elaboration.

**Principals in district C.** In conjunction with their counterparts in Districts A and B, the principals of District C had much to contribute when asked, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” It was clear from their comments that the quality and quantity of communication was viewed as critical to making sure the district was running smoothly.

Following is a summary of their observations on this interview question:

1. The arrangement encourages them to hold regularly scheduled administrative meetings with the principal in District D, these keep them focused on the work that needed to be done and who is responsible for doing it.

2. This has opened the doors for better communication between districts.

3. The superintendent is always easily reachable by phone, email and in person when necessary.

4. “Face” time is important, this superintendent visits each building every Friday and make a real effort to get physically into as many classrooms as possible.
5 He combines his availability with attention to not micro-manage, instead providing guidance and support as needed.

It was obvious to the researcher that what makes the communication work so well in District C is identical to what makes this work so well in Districts A and B: the respect that the principals have for the superintendent and his time constraints, and vice versa. All parties are very conscientious about making every attempt to handle a problem or issue themselves before calling and "bothering" someone else. The principals made no mention of relying on each other for help and advice, which makes sense in this situation since they are all in different buildings and work with different grade levels. It would seem that this would put additional responsibility on the superintendent for concentrated communication, but only one principal – the one who was in his first year in the district – mentioned that he would prefer even more face-to-face communication with the superintendent.

When asked, "What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee's role as a result of the decision to share a superintendent?" the new principal noted that he was not aware of any additional responsibilities had been added. Instead, he felt like those additional responsibilities were generally spread among his colleagues, since he had the largest number of students in his building and by far the most extracurricular responsibilities. On the other hand, he did state in a previous answer that the principal in District D could be doing more supervision, but that was not impacted by the situation with the shared superintendent.
Unlike their counterparts in Districts A and B, the remaining principals in District C were hard pressed to come up with any additional responsibilities that had been added to them as a result of sharing a superintendent. To explain that seeming inconsistency, it is important to note that two of the three remaining principals began their tenure in the district at the same time the whole grading sharing/shared superintendent arrangement was begun. So what seemed additional work to experienced principals in Districts A and B most likely just seemed to be part of the job responsibilities to the principals in District C. Additionally, this is the first principalship for the third principal in District C, so he admittedly has nothing with which to compare his current situation. Finally, most of the extra responsibilities listed by the principals in Districts A and B involved increased state and federal reporting. It is apparent in District C that the shared superintendent has taken upon himself to do the strong majority of these extra reports.

Since none of the principals in District C felt that additional duties had been added as a result of the shared superintendent arrangement, the final interview question regarding how additional workload factored into their effectiveness and job satisfaction became just a question about their personal job satisfaction. The consensus was that they were very satisfied with their job situation, that they had all forged very workable conditions in which they can all be successful building administrators and operate as a functioning team. The only possible negative feedback was offered by the new principal who said that he seemed to be even busier now than he was in his last role when he was supervising three times as many children. However, he did not attribute the extra work to
the shared superintendent situation, instead, it was the whole grade sharing environment that seemed to factor into his extra duties and responsibilities

**Business manager of district C**. The business manager of District C, who was in her twenty-second year in the position at the time of the interview and had therefore worked with the current shared superintendent both before and since the sharing agreement began, when asked the interview question, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders,” said only that the communication was the same for her. Her quote was, “Communication is not a problem, because the superintendent is accountable, he is always where he says he is going to be”.

She also felt that very few additional responsibilities have been added to her position as a result of sharing a superintendent with District D. The only additional responsibility that consumed much of her time was that she felt somewhat compelled, as the most senior partner in the relationship, to mentor the business manager in District D, who was just completing her first year in that position. However, she in no way saw this as something she did not want to do. Instead, she expressed a strong feeling of job satisfaction, saying that a big part of this for her is the fact that enjoys the opportunity to mentor someone else and watch her grow in her position.

**Shared superintendent of districts C and D**. When asked about how the sharing arrangement impacts the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders, the superintendent shared between Districts C and D, like the superintendent of
Districts A and B was able to provide insight into the techniques he uses to make sure that all stakeholders feel they are communicated with constantly. Like his counterpart, he makes every effort to be in each building at least once per week, actually adding this to his schedule every Friday. He not only is in the building, he also gets into as many classrooms as he can, so it is not at all unusual for the teachers and students to see him personally on a weekly basis. He also makes every effort to build relationships with other district leaders, evidenced by the high regard they show for him. Like his counterpart in Districts A and B, he understands that they know that he is always available to them, he offers to help them get better, he is supportive, and he lets them know that he can empathize with the work they are doing and that he always “has their back.”

It is obvious that his additional responsibilities as a result of this arrangement have, in effect, doubled, but he was fully aware that this would be true when he pursued the whole grade sharing option with Districts C and D and he accepts his extra work that has arisen as a result. If anything, he has embraced this as a challenge because he firmly believes that this arrangement has helped both districts and both communities. As has been the case with the other superintendent in this study, as the situation has evolved through the years, his work has essentially worked its way to “manageable” status as he has expertly focused on the most important aspects of being a superintendent in multiple districts and delegated other responsibilities to those in the organization most capable of handling them.
Board president of district C. The board president of District C did not feel that the sharing arrangement had any impact on the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders. He had been associated with the school board long before the start of either the whole grade sharing or the shared superintendent arrangement, and described communication before and after those events as “free-flowing and positive.”

When asked about the additional responsibilities that had been added to his role as a result of the sharing arrangement he noted that he did not feel that anything new had been “added to his plate.” Instead, positive things had emerged, such as the fact that the board felt “protected” because of the high quality of the superintendent, and that he had more insight into what was being done in District D as a result of the sharing agreement. When asked about job satisfaction, he said that, “Expectations are being met for now, but more issues could be on the horizon with the possible incorporation of additional districts” to the sharing situation.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. When asked about how the sharing arrangement impacted the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders, both the director of transportation and the director of facilities and maintenance said one thing stood out with the current shared superintendent: his accessibility. Like their counterparts in District A, they both felt comfortable giving their input whenever they had something to share, and they felt that their ideas and thoughts were always honored by the superintendent.
The chief additional responsibility that impacted both of them due to sharing a superintendent with another district was that they both became shared with the partner district. The director of facilities and grounds had begun in that position in District D and had been asked to serve in that same role for District C as well when a retirement occurred. The director of transportation’s path was the same, except he had been the director of transportation for District C and then was asked to do the same role in District D when an opening occurred. However, they both seemed to embrace the added roles and responsibilities, with the director of facilities and maintenance even commenting that he “Loves it, because keeping busy is good for him!” Both directors expressed extreme satisfaction with their jobs and felt like they had the opportunity to be very effective in their current roles.

Case Study #4 District D

At the time of the interviews, District D served approximately 234 students and did not hold the original contract of the superintendent when they entered a sharing agreement in 2004. The District they shared a superintendent with, District C is contiguous to District D and served approximately 1,125 students.

As with Districts A and B, the sharing agreement began as a result of difficulties that one district was experiencing—this time the key issue was declining enrollment. District D had experienced a drastic drop in students served between 1998 and 2002. In the fall of 2003, a majority of the board was newly elected, and it was shortly after that board election that the board decided to enter into a whole grade sharing agreement with
District C beginning in the fall of 2004. Although the decision seemed sudden to some, this was a concept that had been discussed for years. District C was offering some very attractive incentives, and the newly elected board in District D felt that their election was a mandate from the community to move this direction. The superintendent of District D did not agree with that decision and subsequently she did not stay in her capacity through the end of her contract. District D then brought in an interim to finish the year. During that time, board members of District D had a chance to begin working closely with the superintendent of District C, were impressed by his abilities as a school leader, decided that he had the capacity to represent their district in a fair and equitable manner and, beginning in 2004, began to share this superintendent with District C. That same superintendent has been in that position since the whole grade sharing agreement began in July of 2004 and was beginning his seventh year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Whereas Districts A and B employed a “pure” shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing, Districts C and D have a great amount of whole grade sharing. District C sends its sixth grade students to District D, and District D sends its seventh through twelfth grade students to District C. It is important to note that the whole grade sharing concept does not necessarily lead to a shared superintendent decision. Many districts that whole grade share retain a separate superintendent, the most likely reasons for this are separate superintendents allow districts to maintain some autonomy, while at the same time assuring that each is represented fully in the whole grade sharing arrangement.
District D employs only a grades PK-6 principal, this position is full time. District D also has a full time Director of Facilities and Maintenance who is shared with District C, a full time Business Manager, and a shared Director of Transportation with District C. As with all districts in Iowa, board members are elected by vote of the school district community, the Board President of District D was then elected to that position through a vote of the board members of District D. Following is a summary of their comments as obtained by the interview questions and as they pertain to the research questions.

Research Question #1 What are the Motives for the Decision by Districts to Share Superintendents?

As outlined in Chapter 1, answers to this research question were gathered through the use of three interview questions:

1. What was the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent?
2. What similarities should be in place before this arrangement is considered?
3. What advantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?

Principal in District D. The principal in District D was actually in her current position when the decision was made to share a superintendent with District C back in the fall of 2004, and had been serving District D in that position for several years prior to that decision. She said that the shared superintendent arrangement began as an effort to help her district stay viable as they dealt with severe declining enrollment issues. Her recollection was that, although there was some initial reticence in her district to the idea of sharing a superintendent due to worries that the district would be represented
equitably, people also knew that the superintendent was a strong leader and well regarded—something that her district desperately needed at the time. It seemed to make good sense for other reasons as well: the sharing incentives that were being offered by the state of Iowa at the time, and the continuity of leadership since the districts were whole grade sharing. Just like in the previous case studies, the shared superintendent concept seemed to instantly work well for both districts, once it was proven to District D that they would receive the equitable services that they were promised.

The second interview question intended to help provide answers to research question #1 asks respondents, based on their current experiences, to speculate what similarities need to be in place before considering this type of shared leadership arrangement. The principal in District D suggested the following things: board policies must be similar, there must be a common understanding of the superintendent’s role, and, specific to their case, there needed to be an assurance that the smaller district would still have a school to “build a community around.”

The principal in District D was able to cite numerous advantages to this type of shared arrangement. These included

1. Students get more continuity
2. Students get more cohesiveness
3. There are more people for an additional sounding board
4. There is a larger resource pool of both materials and human capital for initiatives
5. There is the capacity to build stronger relationships
6 Financial incentives provided both districts opportunities for resources that they would not otherwise have.

**Business manager in district D** The business manager for District D was just completing her first year in that capacity at the time of the interview, but she had been living in the community where the schools in District C were located for over a decade and was able to recall the situation that surrounded the decision to share a superintendent. She remembered that it was presented to the communities as a way to pool assets, and that the sudden, dramatic decrease in enrollment in District D had precipitated the move.

When asked what similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered, she focused mostly on the importance of the support of both school boards in understanding the complexities of the position and the fact that no one can be in multiple places at the same time. She also mentioned that community support was critical to making this work.

In regards to advantages from her view in sharing a superintendent, District D’s business manager, like District C’s business manager, indicated that the fact that she has a “sister” business manager in the neighboring district with which to compare notes and procedures is a great advantage. Having just about finished her first year in the position at the time of the interview, it was apparent that partnering with the business manager in District C, who had 22 years of experience in the position, had been critical to the burgeoning success of the business manager of District D.
**Shared superintendent in districts C and D** The shared superintendent between Districts C and D had been serving as the superintendent of District C for five years prior to the time that the opportunity to share became available, so, like the superintendent of Districts A and B, he brought with him the experience needed to undertake this challenge. Furthermore, since he had everything running smoothly in District C, when the sharing began he was positioned to invest the time needed to have an immediate positive impact in District D. In fact, it should be noted that he saw with clarity the advantages of the arrangement long before members of District D, and even long before members of his own community. Part of his foresight came from the fact that his ties to community C, and therefore his proximity to community D, extended back to his own school years, as he is a graduate of District C. For years, he had been extending overtures to District D that revolved around the idea that District C was always available and willing to help in any way and at any time District D was ready. With the new board sworn in during the fall of 2003, it was finally time for District D to make those kinds of decisions.

When asked Interview Question #1, the shared superintendent confirmed that it was a combination of sudden declining enrollment, proximity, and the strong desire for quality, consistent leadership that finally encouraged District D to agree to share the superintendent with District C. By the time he began his tenure as the superintendent of both districts, the financial incentives and the savings that were occurring were already being penciled in as important considerations of both districts’ budgeting practices. He was also able to address and ease the concern that members of District D had that they would be somewhat ignored and treated as “second class.” Even though their District had
fallen on hard times, with good reason they were very proud of their history and the education that they were able to provide their children and they did not want to see that discounted or fall by the wayside. In short order, they realized that was not going to happen with this outstanding educational leader, he recognized and honored their concerns and through his actions dissolved any worries they had in this regard.

Unlike the superintendent of Districts A and B, who had a lengthy list of similarities that he felt should be in place before a sharing arrangement should be considered, the superintendent of Districts C and D noted nothing beyond the fact that proximity is important. Perhaps this is because District C and D are about as dissimilar as two districts can be in Iowa, with the only notable commonality being the border they share. For example, District D educated about 5 times as many students as District C at the time of the interviews, District C had four principals whereas District D had one, and District C was able to offer a very comprehensive menu of extracurricular offerings whereas District D was unable to even field some of the more traditional offerings such as football and wrestling. This raises an important point. whereas the superintendent of Districts A and B felt strongly that many similarities should be place between the districts, the superintendent of Districts C and D did not share that belief. Their experiences and accomplishments would suggest that they are both correct.

The shared superintendent of Districts C and D did have some considerations in his answer to the third interview question regarding the advantages to be found in sharing a superintendent. For example, he spoke of efficiencies of continuity, such as similar
board policies, personnel contracts, professional development, curriculum, and state and federal reporting. He also felt that this gave the districts opportunities to learn from each other and to have a collaborative better handle on “big picture” ideas in education, accelerating their growth as cooperative entities and, in so doing, advantaging their respective students.

Although he did not speak specifically of this as an advantage, it is apparent that both districts, like Districts A and B, are taking advantage of the financial savings beyond the obvious ones provided by the sharing arrangement. To illustrate, the state of Iowa provided, at the time of the interviews, additional savings to districts beyond those of sharing a superintendent, such as sharing a transportation director and a director of facilities and maintenance. Because of the partnerships already in place Districts C and D, when this opportunity became available they were able to take advantage of this opportunity immediately.

Board president of district D. Like the board president of District C, the board president of District D had been a long time community and school board member at the time of the interview and therefore had some historical insight to offer when asked about the rationale behind the decision to share the superintendent. In fact, he had chosen at one point many years before to not run for the board because he believed he had fulfilled his service to the community and that representation was best left to others. However, when the school was faced with the crises that were occurring as the result of sudden and severe declining enrollment, community members approached him about running again,
and he was reelected in the fall of 2003. He truly believed that this was a mandate from the community to make whole grade sharing with District C happen as quickly as possible, and by 2004 that had become a reality, largely due to his leadership. He has chosen to serve on District D’s board ever since and has been reelected as board president every time. As a result of his impact on the whole grade sharing situation, it was often challenging through the course of the interview to encourage him to separate the decision to whole grade share with the decision to share a superintendent, two distinct decisions made at two different times. Regardless, he was a wealth of information and his comments were critical to the findings in the study.

He recalled that economics played an important part in the decision to share the superintendent, but he supported the recollection of the board president of District C that it mainly grew out of the fact that they had already made the decision to whole grade share with District D and they wanted to use this opportunity to cement the relationship. He also felt that it provided continuity to his district in the sense that it helped them retain their own district identity, while at the same time it gave the students of District D the opportunity to “get in on all the benefits that [District C] had to offer.”

When talking about what similarities should be in place before this shared superintendent arrangement is considered, he said that boards and communities must be willing to work together and have a willingness to accept each other as they are. In his opinion, it is also helpful if the districts have similar salaries, committees, and tax structures and assessments. Finally, he offered that it is important that both communities
know what each is receiving and giving up. He commented that some of this can be worked out after the decision is made, but if more of this can be done ahead of time, the better he believes the agreement will work.

Like many others in this study, he was enthusiastic in responding to the question about what advantages had been found in sharing a superintendent. The fact that his district had been able to stay independent and support their own elementary, while at the same time hosting the sixth grade students of District C, was a dramatic positive to the community of District D. Without the financial incentives of the shared superintendent arrangement, it can certainly be speculated that this would be a challenge for District D. Also, since District D’s seventh through twelfth graders were able to attend District C, this gave those students the chance to be educated with a much more rigorous curriculum, as well as participate in the wealth of extracurricular offerings in District C. He questioned whether this would be possible if they were not sharing the same educational leader.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. The researcher was able to interview two additional supervisors, both of which were shared between Districts C and D. The director of facilities and maintenance (similar to the director of buildings and grounds position in District A), who incidentally was the mayor of the town where District D’s school was located, and the transportation director, who had been with District C for 4 years and had, just the year before, become the shared transportation director with District D.
When asked about the rationale behind the decision to share a superintendent, the director of buildings and grounds mentioned the budget as the primary reason. He also mentioned the small size of District D as a factor, along with the fact that they were adjoining districts. Because he had only been in the district for four years, and had spent many of the prior years on the road as a truck driver, the transportation director had no knowledge of why the districts decided to share a superintendent and really could not even speculate.

Neither had lengthy answers to the second interview question regarding similarities between districts that should be in place, but the director of buildings and grounds did say that it was his impression that the students in both communities “got along” and that was an important factor, especially since it was his recollection that some parents in both communities did not support the original effort to share a superintendent.

In answering the third interview question, an advantage noted by the transportation director was that consistency of policy was helpful, saying that in his area it was very helpful that policies in both districts are the same in regards to bus conduct and discipline. He also felt much supported by this particular superintendent when there are issues. The director of facilities and management indicated that since he was shared between Districts C and D as well, he appreciated that there was only one person he needed to track down when he wanted to talk about a situation that warranted person-to-person contact.
Research Question #2  Do Shared Superintendents Face Similar Challenges as Their Counterparts from 20 Years Ago?

As outlined in Chapter 1, four interview questions were utilized to gather answers to this research question:

1. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

Principal in District D  Like so many others in this study, the principal in District D had difficulties coming up with disadvantages in sharing a superintendent. The only thing she mentioned was that there was more organization involved because there were more people (parents, students, staff, fellow administrators) to consider, while at the same time there was one less administrator. But also like so many others when answering this question, she qualified her comments by indicating that this was a very minor issue in her opinion.

When asked if sharing a superintendent assisted or hampered progress toward district goals, the principal in District D felt that it assisted progress because it accelerated the process with fewer layers of administrative oversight. She also added that this arrangement provided the opportunity for a better vision of the big picture.
The principal in District D was able to generate a comprehensive list in ways in which the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader, which included

1. He provides continuity and shared experiences at all levels of both districts
2. The superintendent supports the work of the principals who serve as the instructional leaders in their buildings
3. He leads by example
4. The superintendent provides many opportunities for quality, informal discussions, while providing similar quality opportunities through formal means such as administrative meetings
5. He sets the tone and the expectations for everyone in both districts

When asked how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager, the principal in District D echoed her peers in District C that his ability to empower other supervisors (buildings and grounds, transportation, food service, finance) was crucial to the success of the sharing arrangement. She also felt that his visioning in consolidation of positions, such as those of the director of transportation and the director of facilities and maintenance, provided some much needed simplification to both districts’ services.

Business manager of District D. The business manager of District D felt that there were no disadvantages to be found in sharing a superintendent and that the arrangement assisted progress toward district goals. She noted that both her district, and she surmised
District C, were continually asking how does what one school is doing work, and how can it be applied in the other district?

Like most business managers in this study, District D’s business manager did not have much to say in response to the question of whether the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader, saying only that it was evident in his work with professional development and with technology. However, she did comment that the sharing arrangement had a positive impact on the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager in that it allows him to communicate well with everyone in both districts, it allows him to be more efficient in practical activities such as assembling board agendas for board meetings, and it allows him to advise and give input to each district when he experiences a similar thing in the partner district.

Shared superintendent in districts C and D As in the situation in Districts A and B, the shared superintendent in Districts C and D was able to cite more disadvantages to the sharing situation than either the principals or the business manager. However, it appeared to the researcher that several of them were more analogous to the whole grade sharing arrangement than to the fact that he is shared between two districts. For example, he mentioned that two of the disadvantages came early in the arrangement when the districts were trying to decide issues such as which grades to share, mascots, and school colors. Another very problematic issue was the fact that several of the building principals were opposed to the whole grade sharing agreement, to the point where some of them
decided to seek different professional opportunities. If the districts had not also been
starting a whole grade sharing agreement at the same time as they were beginning to
share a superintendent, these would likely not have been issues. However, the fact that he
has been able to overcome the contentiousness that surrounded some of these beginning
issues is noteworthy. In regards to non-whole grade sharing disadvantages, the
superintendent agrees with the superintendent in Districts A and B in that he believes that
it is a disadvantage that his time and attention is split, but that problem is counterbalanced
by the fact that the fact that he is shared allows both districts to have full time principals
in each of their buildings. Finally, the superintendent of Districts C and D mentioned that
several open enrollment issues had been disadvantageous. Specifically, when students
wanted to open enroll from District D to District C the board members and staff of
District D were challenged to support the superintendent in his decision-making, since it
appeared he was favoring one district over the other.

The shared superintendent feels that it depends on how things are set up as to
whether district goals are assisted or hampered by the sharing arrangement. The districts
have separate goals, but they are on similar topics. So goals are not hampered, but they
are only assisted by the arrangement to the extent that they are similar in nature.

Again, in a marked similarity to the superintendent in Districts A and B, it was
obviously uncomfortable for this superintendent to talk about his personal effectiveness
as an educational leader, but he would obviously have been flattered by the views of the
other people interviewed in District C and D.
Another similarity was that he was more comfortable speaking about the management role of the shared superintendent when he was asked about the effectiveness as a manager, and he also put much credit for the success of that aspect of the arrangement on the others in the district. He feels very comfortable delegating responsibilities to principals, the business managers, and other supervisors and sees his role as one of support and advocacy for the decisions they make. He also believes that it is crucial that the shared superintendent be highly organized, a quality that many of the others interviewed attributed to him. He credits the shared superintendent arrangement for the luxury of having a principal in each building in both districts and believes that this is a successful model for student achievement.

Board president of district D. From the perspective of the board president of District D, there were some initial disadvantage to the shared superintendent arrangement in that when the concept was first introduced he had to smooth over some concerns from his community regarding whether this would give them “second class status” since they would not have their own superintendent. There was a similar worry in that people in District D were concerned that the shared superintendent would never be visible in their community. However, over time, this concern has dissipated through the equitable actions of the shared superintendent. The board president of District D did not respond to the other three interview questions used to arrive at the answer to research question #2.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. Neither the shared director of facilities and maintenance nor the shared director of transportation in Districts C and D could cite any
disadvantages with the shared superintendent arrangement, with the director of transportation saying only that the current superintendent was easy to work with and very supportive. They also did not have responses to the question about whether the sharing arrangement assists or hampers progress toward district goals except that it appeared to the director of facilities and maintenance that the arrangement strengths both districts.

Regarding the question of instructional leaderships, the director of facilities and maintenance noted only that the superintendent was always there when teachers, principals, and he needed him. The director of transportation concurred that the superintendent “is good at leading teachers.”

They had more to offer when asked about the effect of the sharing agreement on the superintendent’s ability to manage the districts, with the director of facilities and maintenance commenting that the superintendent is quite effective as a manager because he trusts his employees, errs on the side of caution when making difficult decisions, and is honest and forthcoming when it comes to issues of the budget. The director of transportation concurred, saying that he displays a great deal of trust in delegating responsibilities to others and is always willing to discuss different points of view.

Research Question #3 Have the Lessons Learned from the Prior Research been Heeded over the Last Two Decades?

According to the research done by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) one of the main concerns was the excessive overload that was being placed on the person attempting to perform the task. In some cases the workload was being doubled while the
amount of time needed to focus on the work was being halved, creating decreased job satisfaction and eventual “burn out” in even the most motivated individuals. Secondary concerns revolved around the natural loss of relationship-building necessary to be an effective leader, lack of visibility at events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position.

As outlined in Chapter 1, five interview questions were designed to help arrive at the answer to this question of whether the lessons outlined by the prior research are being heeded.

1. What similarities between districts should be in place before this arrangement is considered?
2. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
3. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
5. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

In synthesizing the responses to these interview questions in relation to Research Question #3, a special emphasis has been placed on respondents’ answers to the third interview question listed, since parts of the other four interview questions have been analyzed previously in this case study. Work overload, relationship-building, visibility at
events, and a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities of the position are the issues focused on in the following analysis.

**Principal in District D** The principal of District D was in agreement with all of the principals in this study that, although extremely busy all of the time and always productive, it was her perception that the superintendent’s work load was manageable. As with Districts A and B, it was apparent to the researcher that the superintendent of Districts C and D was able to work a reasonable schedule due to two main reasons: his ability to delegate tasks to the people in the organization best able to handle those tasks, and the experience and expertise of those people to be able to complete those tasks in an exceptional manner. In addition, the principal in District D did not indicate that she felt personally overburdened by this sharing arrangement.

This also addressed another issue emphasized by the Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) research in regards to loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. Again, just like the superintendent of Districts A and B, this shared superintendent has been quite savvy in choosing which responsibilities to delegate and which to retain, in so doing he has indeed given up some personal control over daily responsibilities, but that has been purposeful and has made good sense in consideration of all the circumstances. Therefore, he is not grieving over the loss of that control, since it was his decision to give that up.

The principal of District D, concerning the interview question, how does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a community
advocate for more than one community, was extremely complimentary of the shared superintendent’s ability to meet this challenge. This question was designed to get answers to the issues raised by the previous research regarding the loss of relationship-building thought necessary to be a successful leader and the natural lack of visibility at events that will occur when the superintendent is shared.

Unlike her partner principals in District C, the principal of District D did not mention the hurdles that needed to be overcome for the shared superintendent to have success in this situation. Instead, she focused on the positive in offering some specific ways in which he was successfully handling this challenge.

1. The communities naturally tend to blend due to their proximity and natural ties.
2. Although there are not a lot of community activities in District D, the superintendent is careful to make sure that he participates in those activities.
3. He is physically present in District D every day unless he has to attend a meeting out of the districts.
4. Each Friday, he walks through the building, stopping in classrooms to chat and observe.

From the principal in District D’s viewpoint, there is no issue of lack of relationship-building and visibility because the superintendent realizes the importance of these and is quite conscientious of doing everything he can to excel in these areas.

Business manager of district D. The business manager of District D in her answer to the interview question about how the sharing arrangement impacted the effectiveness...
of the superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community, agreed with the business manager in District C that he is excellent in this regard, claiming that he, “Makes each district feel important.” She added that it was her observation that the shared superintendent spent the majority of his time in District C, but that through his actions, such as coming to District D every day, he was also assuring the stakeholders in District D that they were equitable partners in this relationship.

**Shared superintendent in districts C and D** The superintendent shared by Districts C and D seemed to just accept the fact that relationship-building with both external communities and visibility in same was part of the job and did not seem at all overburdened by the amount of time he expended in those efforts. When told about the high regard other respondents had for him in this area and asked how he can make this work, he responded only that it was easier in a whole grade sharing situation because there was only one high school which houses most of the school activities for both communities. This gives him only one site to attend for most events giving him some time efficiencies.

Also, it should be noted that the community that surrounds District D is quite small, this is important in the fact that it puts its effort into a few major events per year, it is clear that the superintendent makes sure that he is making every effort to attend these focused events. There is an additional benefit in that, because District D has so few events, there are not many competing events for the superintendent to have to choose from, unlike the superintendent in Districts A and B.
As with the superintendent in Districts A and B, at no time during the interview did the shared superintendent of Districts C and D complain of an excessive workload or a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. He also seemed to feel that the pressures and stress he feels are no different than those of his peers and are seldom if ever a result of being shared between two districts. Whenever he could, he gave credit for what was being accomplished to the efforts and expertise of the people he works with. Often, they gave him the credit for being so organized and his willingness and success in delegating responsibilities to others.

Board president of district D. As with interviews with other board presidents in this study, there was no indication during the interview of the board president of District D that he felt the shared superintendent was pressured or stressed abnormally due to the responsibility of being the executive leader of multiple districts. Interestingly, in the Meyer (1990) research, this was a disconnect between the board presidents and the shared superintendents, the superintendents felt that the shared superintendent arrangement added much more to their stress than the board presidents did. In District D, even when interviewed independently, it is apparent that both the board president and the superintendent agree that the pressure and stress has been minimized due to efforts on everyone’s part to make this work for the benefit of the students of both districts. He indicated that he held high expectations of the shared superintendent, particularly in the area of equitability for his district, but that he had no concerns about those high expectations being met and exceeded by this superintendent.
Other supervisors in districts C and D. Neither the director of transportation nor the director of facilities and maintenance commented specifically on any noticeable excess stress by the shared superintendent due to a perceived increased workload or due to a loss of personal control over daily responsibilities. Instead, they both indicated that he was always available to them for any decision-making that needed to occur, this was critical to their roles, as they were obviously quite busy serving in their positions for both districts. If extra stress was added due to a lack of availability of the superintendent, that would greatly increase their personal job stress.

The director of transportation did not have much to contribute about the effectiveness of the shared superintendent as a community advocate for more than one community, saying only that “He divides his time fairly.” However, the viewpoint of the director of facilities and maintenance was quite interesting as he also served as the mayor of the town where the school in District D is located at the time of the interviews. He was quite effusive in his praise of the work of the superintendent to be visible and involved in his community, saying that the superintendent was always available to meet with parents and the public and that the arrangement is going very well, with the superintendent just as involved in District D’s community as he is in the community of District C. He concluded, “This is important, because he is seen as the superintendent for both communities, not just one.”
Research Question #4 Are There Any New Challenges Facing Superintendents Today?

As with Research Question #3, there were five interview questions designed to answer Research Question #4 Are there any new challenges facing superintendents today? The five interview questions were

1. What disadvantages have you found in sharing a superintendent?
2. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
3. Does sharing a superintendent assist or hamper progress toward district goals?
4. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?
5. How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

Although none of these five interview questions specifically addresses the research question, the researcher used the respondents’ answers to these questions combined with the historical view of a superintendent provided through the Review of Literature in Chapter 2 to arrive at the following conclusions from the following groups:

Principal in district D If asked the direct question, the principal in District D would most likely agree with her counterparts in Districts A, B, and C and suggest that the shared superintendent situation that has developed between her district and their partner district has elements of the classical view of a superintendent from twenty years...
ago, combined with the new expectations that stakeholders hold of their educational leader

As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, 20 years ago, the school superintendent’s role was viewed as more of a manager than a leader. In his book Leading Change, Kotter (1996) provides a clear differentiation between these two roles. According to Kotter, “Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. The most important aspects of management include planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving” (p. 25). He goes on to write that the product of management is, “A degree of predictability and order and has the potential to consistently produce the short-term results expected by various stakeholders” (p. 25). These were the skills and abilities that were expected of school superintendents two decades ago, and the results are in line with what Kotter outlines: predictability and order.

Kotter contrasts this with the following description of leadership, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (p. 25). He believes that the product of leadership is, “Change – often to a dramatic degree, and has the potential to produce extremely useful change” (p. 26). As noted in Chapter 2, although stakeholders still demand all the aspects of management, today they also want the advantages that leadership can provide.
Also in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, Daft (2005) points out direct contrasts between what he terms ‘the old paradigm’ and ‘the new paradigm,’ calling this the “new reality for leadership” (p 8). The old paradigm focused on stability and control; the new paradigm calls for change, crisis management, and empowerment. Whereas the old paradigm of leadership was about uniformity and could be self-centered, it is the expectation that today’s leaders be focused on collaboration, diversity, and a higher purpose.

Therefore, the new challenges facing school leaders today include visioning, persuading stakeholders to support that vision, inspiring change to happen despite the obstacles, managing crises, and empowering diverse groups to collaborate toward a higher purpose.

Elements of all of these new challenges are evident in the remarks made by the principal of District D regarding her shared superintendent situation. The best example to illustrate this is the whole grading sharing initiative. District C had a vision of how they could help a struggling neighboring district, while at the same time create conditions where their own district could get even better. Change was inspired, as communities, school staff, parents, and students had to learn in a very short time period all the collaborative dynamics needed to make this work in the best interests of all. Many crises were managed, as the superintendent noted this spanned from seemingly minor issues such as school colors and mascot all the way to critical decisions such as which grade levels were going to attend which schools. But ultimately all groups were able to
collaborate toward this higher purpose and by all internal measures this is working well in both District C and D

Unlike the four principals of District C, who would agree with their counterparts in Districts A and B in recommending a shared superintendent concept to face these new challenges of leadership, the principal of District D would only recommend this arrangement with some caveats. First and foremost, she believes that it must depend on what is best for the districts involved, the person chosen also must be the right leader for this to work, with the most important quality of that person is that he or she is equitable and focused on keeping things fair and balanced between the districts.

**Business manager of district D.** In conjunction with her job alike partners in Districts A, B, and C, the business manager of District D would agree that the new challenges as outlined by the research are indeed true of the current view of the superintendent position, and that a shared superintendent can meet these new challenges under the right conditions. In her view, there must be a positive environment in which both districts as seen as being “rewarded” by the arrangement, and there must be a great deal of consistency of practice between the districts as well.

**Shared superintendent of districts C and D.** The superintendent shared by Districts C and D echoed the unique perspective to this research question concerning the new challenges faced by superintendents today that was raised by the superintendent of Districts A and B. Prior to becoming the shared superintendent in this situation, he had served as a superintendent of District C only, after previously serving that district as its
secondary principal. He agrees with the other shared superintendent in this study that the new challenges really do not have much to do with the additional responsibilities of serving multiple districts as their executive leader. Instead, they have more to do with increasing expectations placed on districts by state and federal lawmakers. Mandated initiatives such as compliance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the state of Iowa's Core Curriculum are the greatest contributors to additional work for district executive leaders.

Unlike the superintendent in Districts A and B, the shared superintendent of Districts C and D does the vast majority of this reporting on his own, not “farming it out” to others such as the principals and business manager. When asked about this, he viewed this as just “part of getting the job done,” and did not view it as an excessive burden. In his opinion, almost all of the reporting of the two districts he leads is quite similar, so once one is done it is really not that much effort to do the same report for the partner district.

It was clear to the researcher that the difference in viewpoint on this important matter is that in Districts A and B there are no elements of whole grade sharing, whereas in Districts C and D the majority of grades are shared. Therefore, when a report is done for District A, for example, the same report in District B would involve a whole new set of circumstances and data. However, when the superintendent of District C does a report, since many of the students are shared it is often the exact same report for District D.
fact, there would be no extra reporting on the secondary sections of District D, for example, because all of those students are reported with District C’s data.

The shared superintendent of Districts C and D would agree with the principals and the business manager in that he would recommend this arrangement, but he also has some caveats. He believes that districts need to question themselves and each other about the duration of the agreement before entering into it and have had meaningful discussions on future partnerships and what this agreement will lead to. He commented, “When things are going well, people are happy, when not, people are unhappy.” It is during those “unhappy” times when a tenuous sharing agreement may become stressed.

Board president of District D. In line with his counterpart in District D, the board president of District D had a long history with both the community and the school board at the time of the interview and agreed with the others in Districts C and D in that there were certainly new challenges facing the superintendent than there had been when he first became involved. He understood how the whole grade sharing agreement added to the challenges of the learning community of District D, but very strongly felt that they were meeting these challenges and agreed with District C’s board president that the whole arrangement was in the best interests of everyone involved. When asked if he would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement he gave an emphatic “yes!”, as long as they could get a high caliber superintendent to share like they had done. He said that there was no possibility that District D could attract such a talented leader on their own without the help of District C.
Other supervisors in districts C and D. Being somewhat removed from the educational aspect of both districts and solely focused on the management aspects, it was to be expected and natural that the director of transportation and the director of facilities and management of Districts C and D would mirror their counterparts in District A and would not have much to contribute to the answer to Research Question #4. The management issues that they deal with on a day-to-day basis, such as vehicle maintenance, weather concerns, building and grounds updates, and so on have been traditionally viewed as items on which they partner with superintendents, no different today than it was twenty years ago.

However, the director of facilities and maintenance would recommend this type of arrangement to others that are considering it, indicating that the cost savings that it provides allows districts more flexibility in their capacity to improve education. The director of transportation, on the other hand, said that he believed that the size of the districts would factor into the decision, indicating that it would take at least one district of substantial size, as in the case of their situation, for it to work.

**Research Question #5: What Impact on the Roles of District Leaders, if any, has Resulted from the Decision to Share a Superintendent?**

As outlined in Chapter 1, six interview questions were designed to answer this research question. The interview questions were:

1. Would you recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement? Why or why not?
2 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as an instructional leader?

3 How does the sharing arrangement impact the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager?

4 How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?

5 What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee’s role as the result of the decision to share a superintendent?

6 How does the added work load, if any, factor into the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the interviewee?

The focus of the following summarization of the findings on this research question will be on respondents’ answers to the last three interview questions listed above, as they pertain most directly to the research question. Information from the first three interview questions will be added peripherally on an “as needed” basis for clarification and elaboration.

Principal in district D When asked, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders?” the principal of District D mentioned only that communication was “not a problem, as long as effort is made from both sides.” There did not appear to be any underlying currents or concerns however. Based on her answers to previous questions, it was apparent that she was getting the communication with the shared superintendent that she needed,
complimenting him on the opportunities they had for both formal and informal discussions.

When asked, "What additional responsibilities, if any, have been added to the interviewee's role as a result of the decision to share a superintendent?" the principal in District D noted that she had to serve on some additional committees, but it made sense to her that she do so and that, instead of this being an extra burden, it gave her the opportunity to "bounce ideas" off of more people. She also praised the shared superintendent for his coaching in helping her learn how to delegate responsibilities better, leading to more quality choices of responsibility.

The final interview question regarding how additional workload factored into their effectiveness and job satisfaction drew an impassioned response from District D's principal, who claimed that she had increased satisfaction because the arrangement allowed her to be "surrounded by professionals who care about kids." For her whole administrative career before the whole grade sharing arrangement and the subsequent shared superintendent opportunity, she had been a single building administrator, working in a fairly isolated situation, with an educational leader who was not highly regarded. It was very beneficial to her to get the opportunity to work with the shared superintendent who had obviously put a great deal of effort into helping her become the school leader she had the potential to become.

**Business manager of district D** The business manager of District D, who was only just completing her first year in the position at the time of the interview, when asked...
the interview question, “How does the sharing arrangement impact the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders,” said only that the communication was “not lacking.” She felt that the shared superintendent was very accessible to her and heard no issues with his communication with others.

She also felt that very few additional responsibilities have been added to her position as a result of sharing a superintendent with District C and could not list any except her management of the shared superintendent’s contract. She also did not comment about her effectiveness and job satisfaction.

Shared superintendent of districts C and D. When asked about how the sharing arrangement impacts the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders, the superintendent shared between Districts C and D, like the superintendent of Districts A and B, was able to provide insight into the techniques he uses to make sure that all stakeholders feel they are communicated with constantly. Like his counterpart, he makes every effort to be in each building at least once per week, actually adding this to his schedule every Friday. He not only is in the building, he also gets into as many classrooms as he can, so it is not at all unusual for the teachers and students to see him personally on a weekly basis. He also makes every effort to build relationships with other district leaders, evidenced by the high regard they show for him. Like his counterpart in Districts A and B, he understands that they know that he is always available to them, he offers to help them get better, he is supportive, and he lets them know that he can empathize with the work they are doing and that he always “has their back.”
It is obvious that his additional responsibilities as a result of this arrangement have, in effect, doubled, but he was fully aware that this would be true when he pursued the whole grade sharing option with Districts C and D and he accepts his extra work that has arisen as a result. If anything, he has embraced this as a challenge because he firmly believes that this arrangement has helped both districts and both communities. As has been the case with the other superintendent in this study, as the situation has evolved through the years, his work has essentially worked its way to “manageable” status as he has expertly focused on the most important aspects of being a superintendent in multiple districts and delegated other responsibilities to those in the organization most capable of handling them.

Board president of district D. The board president of District D mirrored the thoughts of the board president of District C in that he did not feel that the sharing arrangement had any negative impact on the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders. In fact, he was quite complimentary of the superintendent’s ability to communicate, noting that he respected that the superintendent was comfortable in “expressing his opinion” and that he always follows up on the questions that the board president has for him.

When asked about the additional responsibilities that had been added to his role as a result of the sharing arrangement he said that there were none, and highlighted that the superintendent was highly organized, making it “easy” for him to be the board president. For him to stay in this role long after he had completed the work he felt compelled to do
by his community, it was obvious to the researcher that he felt a great deal of satisfaction in his role as board president.

Other supervisors in districts C and D. When asked about how the sharing arrangement impacted the communication between the superintendent and other district leaders, both the director of transportation and the director of facilities and maintenance said one thing stood out with the current shared superintendent—his accessibility. Like their counterparts in District A, they both felt comfortable giving their input whenever they had something to share, and they felt that their ideas and thoughts were always honored by the superintendent.

The chief additional responsibility that impacted both of them due to sharing a superintendent with another district was that they both became shared with the partner district. The director of facilities and grounds had begun in that position in District D and had been asked to serve in that same role for District C as well when a retirement occurred. The director of transportation’s path was the same, except he had been the director of transportation for District C and then was asked to do the same role in District D when an opening occurred. However, they both seemed to embrace the added roles and responsibilities, with the director of facilities and maintenance even commenting that he “Loves it, because keeping busy is good for him!” Both directors expressed extreme satisfaction with their jobs and felt like they had the opportunity to be very effective in their current roles.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR FUTURE STUDY

Summary

The purpose of the study was to provide information about shared superintendents to school districts in Iowa and across the nation who, for whatever reasons germane to their respective districts, are considering moving to this kind of executive leader format. It was felt that this research will also be useful to the Iowa Legislature as they consider expanding the timelines of current incentives in Iowa law that support shared superintendents, currently projected to sunset in 2013. Specifically, this study focused on how other leadership positions in the district, such as principals, business managers, board presidents, and other supervisors were affected by the use of a shared executive leader.

This study was limited to four school districts in Iowa which, in pairs, have shared the same superintendent for over a half decade. All of the communities that form part of the school districts in the study are rural, the economy of all four communities is primarily agriculturally based, and the communities are not especially racially or ethnically diverse, which is typical of most small communities in Iowa. Findings are limited to the four districts studied and the perceptions of those interviewed at the time.
they were interviewed. The validity of the data was further limited to the respondents' interpretations of interview questions and their willingness to respond honestly.

The interviews were held on site in participants' respective districts labeled "A," "B," "C," and "D" for the purposes of confidentiality. District A serves approximately 650 students and held the original contract of the superintendent when they entered a sharing agreement in 1999. The district they share a superintendent with, District B, is contiguous to District A and serves approximately 450 students. These two districts employ a "pure" shared superintendent situation in that there are no elements of whole grade sharing; the only services they share are the superintendent and a transportation director. The superintendent shared by Districts A and B was beginning his ninth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Because "pure" sharing situations like that utilized by Districts A and B are so rare and, once entered into, seem to last for such a short time, the second superintendent sharing situation studied had some elements of whole grade sharing included at the time of the study. District C entered into a sharing arrangement with District D beginning in 2004, at the time of the study they remained two separate districts with distinct boards of education, administrative teams, business managers, and supervisors, but did include some whole grade sharing elements at the middle school and high school levels. District C was by far the larger of the two and the largest in the study, serving over 1100 students and including two separate elementary buildings. District C was the original holder of the superintendent contract. As part of the agreement to share the superintendent, District C
sends its sixth grade students to District D. District D is by far the smallest of the four districts highlighted in this study with an enrollment of under 200, District D sends its 7th through 12th grade students to District C. The superintendent shared by Districts C and D was beginning his sixth year in that capacity when the interviews were conducted.

Each of these districts was the subject of a case study wherein the researcher asked the shared superintendent, building leaders, board presidents, business managers, and select supervisors in departments such as transportation, custodial, and grounds/building and maintenance a variety of questions the answers of which, when compiled and synthesized, led to answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the motives for the decision by districts to share superintendents?
2. Do shared superintendents face similar challenges as their counterparts from 20 years ago?
3. Have the lessons learned from the prior research been heeded over the last two decades?
4. Are there any new challenges facing shared superintendents today?
5. What impact on the roles of district leaders, if any, has resulted from the decision to share a superintendent?

In accordance with stipulations provided by the University of Northern Iowa’s Institutional Review Board, the superintendents of potential participating districts were given an outline of the study and then asked to respond with a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix C) indicating district willingness to participate in the research. Once that
permission was obtained, individual participants who qualified for inclusion in the study were contacted by the researcher and given an outline of the study (Appendix B), those agreeing to participate signed a consent form (Appendix A) prior to responding to interview questions. All potential respondents contacted agreed to participate, all interviews were conducted through completion.

During the month of November, 2010, a total of 23 interviews were conducted in District A (7 interviews), District B (5 interviews), District C (9 interviews), and District D (2 interviews). Each shared superintendent was interviewed only once. Also, since there was additional sharing of duties and job titles in both pairs of situations, whenever that occurred the affected individual was interviewed only once. For example, Districts C and D share both a Director of Facilities and Maintenance and a Director of Transportation. Districts A and B share a Director of Transportation. Only one interview was conducted with each of these individuals.

Interviews lasted an average of approximately 40 minutes. Interviews for District A were held in various sites throughout the district including the superintendent’s office, the conference room near the high school principal’s office, an Iowa Communications Network room in the high school, and a conference room in the elementary building, located several blocks away from the high school. Interviews for District B were conducted in the business manager’s office, the superintendent’s office, and in an elementary conference room located in a neighboring town. All of the interviews for
Districts C and D were conducted in District C's Board of Education Conference Center located at one of the elementary buildings.

The researcher was permitted by the University of Northern Iowa's Institutional Review Board to have one of their certified research assistants in the room while the interviews were being conducted. Her function was to take notes during the interview and assure that the digital recording device was working properly throughout. This allowed the researcher to concentrate fully on the interview and utilize the advantage of probing questions permitted through interpretive research. Following the completion of interviews, the recordings were then transferred to a compact disc by the research assistant. The researcher used the notes taken during the interviews, crossed-referenced with the recordings, to support and verify the information contained in the interviews.

Because this methodology yielded 23 interviews, there was a need to have a format in place from the onset to categorize and organize the data. Since this was interpretive research, statistical analysis of numbers was not needed. However, many comparisons needed to be made from the anecdotal information collected in an effort to arrive at summaries and results that those schools considering sharing their executive officer might find helpful and meaningful. The ideal method chosen allowed for continuous and simultaneous collecting and processing of data. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) the best method for accomplishing all of these goals was the Constant Comparative Method as outlined in their text *Naturalistic Inquiry*. 
This method involved comparing incidents applicable to each category. For this study, each research question was considered a category. Therefore, as questions were asked during the interview and responses given, every response that could be tied directly back to one of the five research questions was coded to that question. Each interview question was designed to coincide with a particular research question or set of questions. Additionally, since this was interpretive research and the researcher was consequently allowed to probe interview answers with follow-up questions, further meaningful information was gained, this was also coded to the applicable research question or questions.

Using this Constant Comparison Method allowed for continual filtration and funneling of interview results into meaningful and useful data to summarize for the study. Following is that data summary, organized in sections coinciding with each of the five research questions.

Research Question #1 What are the Motives for the Decision by Districts to Share Superintendents?

Every one of the 23 people interviewed in this study indicated that the economics or finances of at least one of the districts led to the decision to share a superintendent. This is in line with the conclusions drawn in the research conducted 20 years ago by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991). Although neither District A or B was in a challenging financial situation when they began sharing a superintendent, the financial benefits were immediately apparent to decision-makers in both districts, so much so that
when the shared superintendent decided to retire, they agreed to pursue a school leader who they would continue to share as a superintendent. At the time of the study, that superintendent was now retiring, and they again were committed to searching for yet another educational leader who could meet the demands of the shared superintendent position. Over the course of the decade-long arrangement between Districts A and B, the shared superintendent estimated that the agreement had resulted in over $500,000 in combined savings and revenue to both districts.

District C was not experiencing financial difficulties either at the time the decision was made to share the superintendent, but District D was on the verge of some serious funding issues. Everyone interviewed from District D who was aware of those issues remains gratified for the altruism shown their district by District C.

This alludes to the second motivation to share theme that emerged from the results of these case studies, which was that in both sharing situations there was the need for one district to reach out and help the other. Interestingly, both problems stemmed from a real or perceived lack of leadership. District B needed the leadership that the superintendent in District A could provide. District D needed the leadership that the superintendent in District C could provide. Decision-makers in Districts B and D observed the strong leadership that was occurring in both Districts A and C, and all districts were able to work together in their respective pairs to overcome any obstacles to sharing their educational leaders.
The only other motivation mentioned by multiple interviewees was that the board presidents of Districts C and D both mentioned that the whole grade sharing arrangement between their districts played a role in the decision to share the superintendent. Whereas some stakeholders in District D were originally concerned that their autonomy would be compromised if they did not have their own leader to represent them, the collaborative work done by the superintendent of District C through the whole grade sharing process alleviated most of that concern, and they additionally recognized the benefits to their district of having a strong, well-regarded school leader.

**Research Question #2  Do Shared Superintendents Face Similar Challenges as Their Counterparts from 20 Years Ago?**

Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991) discovered that there were challenges with these shared superintendent agreements. One main concern expressed by both board presidents and shared superintendents included the excessive work overload that was being placed on these individuals. Doubling the work load while cutting the amount of time to do the work was quickly leading to decreased job satisfaction and “burn out” of even some of the most self-motivated superintendents. Another main concern expressed by board presidents and superintendents in their study was that there was a loss of personal contact and control between the educational leader of the district and its stakeholders that was difficult to overcome. Communities which were used to seeing and communicating with their chief administrator at functions and events now no
longer saw that individual nearly as often, and shared superintendents found themselves dealing with a sense of loss of personal control over day to day job responsibilities.

These challenges were not as apparent 20 years later. In fact, the challenge for respondents seemed to be to come up with any disadvantages to either shared superintendent situation, and when they were able to offer some, they often did so with some sort of caveat. For example, two of the least experienced principals offered that they would like more mentoring time with their superintendent, but only because their current mentoring activities were so rich and productive. Several mentioned that there were rare times when they would have to make an additional phone call, but that that was a minor issue for them. Other disadvantages cited by respondents were admittedly perception or speculation. For instance, one board president felt like this arrangement had to place more pressure and stress on the principals, but that was in no way confirmed by those principals. Five of the 23 interviewees could not come up with any disadvantages to the shared superintendent situation at all, even when asked probing questions by the researcher.

This research showed that the shared superintendent arrangement also does not hamper progress toward district goals, another challenge cited by past research (Meyer, 1990). Only one of the 23 interviewees felt that this arrangement hampered progress, whereas six felt it assisted progress, and the remainder felt that it either had no effect or that it was goal dependent.
Furthermore, only one interviewee indicated that the shared superintendent arrangement had a negative impact on the superintendents’ effectiveness as an instructional leader, an important consideration given the research of Mazano and Waters (2009). Every other respondent felt that this arrangement actually promoted the superintendents’ effectiveness, mainly because it gave them more resources from which to draw. Achievement initiatives that were working in one district could be more easily transferred to the partner district, and time was not wasted trying initiatives in a district that were not working in a partner district.

Finally, every interviewee indicated that the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager was impacted in a positive way by the sharing arrangement. For some, such as most of the supervisors and principals, the combination of their superintendent’s ability to not be a micro-manager but also be readily available was an aspect that gave them a great deal of job satisfaction. This coincides with both superintendents’ comments about the importance of hiring good people and being willing to delegate to those people as a key to the success of the arrangement.

Therefore, in consideration of the limitations of this study, the challenges cited by the prior research are not as evident as they were 20 years ago. Respondents had a great deal of difficulty verbalizing any disadvantages to their sharing situation that were not minor or speculative. Almost every interviewee felt that sharing a superintendent in no way hampered progress toward district goals. A perception that instructional leadership might be a new challenge faced by today’s superintendent, especially one who is shared,
was unfounded. And all respondents indicated that the shared superintendent situation provided for even better management skills than in a non-shared environment.

**Research Question #3** Have the Lessons Learned from the Prior Research been Heeded over the Last Two Decades?

According to the research done by Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey (1990, 1991), the three main challenges facing shared superintendents 20 years ago became, in effect, lessons learned. If districts were going to consider sharing a superintendent, their research cautioned that something must be done to counter the excessive workload that led to decreased job satisfaction, the ability to form and establish relationships needed to effectively lead, and the challenges of community involvement when serving multiple communities.

In addressing the issue of decreased job satisfaction of the superintendent, from the interviews that were conducted as part of this study it was apparent that neither shared superintendent was experiencing any degree of decreased job satisfaction. Although they were able to cite more disadvantages than any of the other respondents, these disadvantages were clearly things that they had come to accept and did not factor into how they felt about their work. For example, both indicated that it was a disadvantage that their time and attention was split between two districts, but qualified that point by indicating that the trade-off was that they had a chance to positively influence more people as a result of serving multiple districts. All other interviewees agreed that the workloads of both superintendents seemed manageable.
However, one of the superintendents did indicate that he felt challenged to form and establish the kind of deep relationships that could lead to even more effective leadership, which is in agreement with the prior research of 20 years ago. This seemed to be his one regret of the sharing situation. On the other hand, it is important to note that none of the interviewees in his shared districts indicated that they concurred with him that this was a problem. Instead, some of his principals marveled in the superintendent’s ability to be so closely involved with the students and staff in the districts and were baffled by his seeming ability to be so many places at once.

Perhaps both superintendents alleviate this concern by their efforts to be in every district building they serve at least once per week. Regardless, it seems likely that their concern about not forming and establishing strong relationships is actually motivating them to do so by making sure they take measures and invest time in this critical component of leadership.

There is no question that the community involvement of both superintendents is challenged by this sharing situation. One superintendent has responded, since he was hired, by indicating that his work is with the children of the communities, and to focus on the importance of those efforts means that he will be less active in community roles than he would be if not shared. This stance has been critical to making this sharing situation work, while at the same time there are still members of his learning community that long for more involvement. When this question arises, the board presidents of each of the districts he serves are quick to rush to his defense and explain the situation.
This is less of a distraction for the other shared superintendent as he was raised in one of the communities and already had deep ties and connections to that community before becoming the superintendent. His challenge is to make sure that the other community served by his position is getting the time and attention they feel is warranted. According to all respondents of that second community, including its mayor who was a supervisor interviewed for this study, the shared superintendent has accomplished this beautifully by attending the few community functions that occur throughout the year.

Therefore, the research in this study indicates that the lessons have been learned, at least within the limitations of this study. Through careful consideration of all the complexities, the job satisfaction of shared superintendents can be high, through careful attention to process, shared superintendents can build strong and lasting relationships with staff and students, and with careful explanations to stakeholders agreement can be reached on an acceptable role of the superintendent beyond the school environment.

Research Question #4 Are There Any New Challenges Facing Shared Superintendents Today?

The research of Kotter (1996) and Daft (2005) indicates that the new challenges facing today’s leaders include visioning, persuading stakeholders to support that vision, inspiring change to happen despite the obstacles, managing crises, and empowering diverse groups to collaborate toward a higher purpose. All four districts in this study had examples of initiatives which contained elements of the superintendent’s ability to successfully lead their respective districts to overcome all of these challenges. For
District A it was the one-to-one computer initiative, for District B, the construction project, and for Districts C and D, the move to whole grade sharing. From these examples, outlined in detail in Chapter 4, it is obvious that these four districts, through the leadership of their respective superintendents, are able to meet and exceed all of the new challenges as outlined by the research of Kotter and Daft.

Perhaps because of successes like these, all 23 interviewees said that they would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement. However, almost all of them also had some caveats to their recommendation. Often, these caveats were germane to their own particular role in the organization. For example, two of the business managers would recommend this arrangement as long as there are business managers in each district and that they have a great working relationship. Several of the principals would recommend the arrangement, but felt that it would be best served by a person who already had experience as a superintendent. Five respondents noted with emphasis that this arrangement is very much person-dependent, there must be a skill set already in place before taking on this challenge. Interestingly, there were comments made in both sharing situations that they felt it would only work in their particular unique arrangement, and not in any other, noteworthy since the arrangements in the two case studies were actually quite diverse.
Research Question #5  What Impact on the Roles of District Leaders, if any, has Resulted from the Decision to Share a Superintendent?

Predictably, both shared superintendents in this study noted that their work had essentially doubled when taking on the challenge of multiple districts. They serve two boards, which lead to two board meetings per month, whereas most districts the size of those in this study only have one per month. They have twice as many building principals to supervise and mentor, and double the amount of facilities to manage and oversee. They answer to multiple learning communities, all of which have their own interests and needs. Most importantly, they are responsible for the education of hundreds more students than many non-shared superintendents.

Yet even in light of all these challenges, both superintendents expressed a high degree of job satisfaction. In fact, these challenges seem to actually motivate them. Perhaps that is because they have both found ways to lead and manage through the increased workload and expectations. Probably the most important factor in this is their shared ability to communicate. Throughout the interviews, they have each been described as being accessible, approachable, empathetic, and “great listeners.” It is obvious that they place a high degree of emphasis on communicating on a very frequent basis with all district leaders, equally as important, they make sure everyone knows that they are never too busy to listen and help, and they follow through on this with their actions.

Another common factor is that both superintendents place an emphasis on hiring wisely and delegating appropriately. The researcher was impressed by the level of ability
of every one of the 23 people interviewed, and it was apparent that each person was well
suited to his or her particular role in the organization. Except for the superintendents, few
interviewees could point to any increases in their job responsibilities as a result of sharing
the superintendent, and those that did qualified their comments with the caveat that the
increased responsibilities actually made them proud to be able to contribute in additional
ways to their districts. A few did indicate that there was some extra reporting to do, but
that came with the rationale that that was mostly likely due to the additional state and
federal mandates that have been placed on schools through legislation over the last
decade rather than the shared superintendent arrangement. Every person who is employed
in each district expressed a high degree of job satisfaction, with many being quite
effusive in their descriptions of how much they enjoy their work.

There are additional factors beyond these superintendents’ abilities to
communicate well, hire wisely, and delegate appropriately that have made the sharing
arrangements in these case studies work so well. At times throughout the interviews,
some respondents would qualify their answers with comments that indicated that they felt
this arrangement would not work well with just any school leader, that there is a
knowledge and skill set necessary for success in this role. When this issue was raised, the
researcher followed up with probing questions to inquire what was necessary for success
in a shared superintendency. Qualities and knowledge included a strong background in
finance, knowing the difference between stakeholders’ needs and wants, a strong sense of
fair play, great organizational and time management skills, the ability to trust and be
trusted, a tendency to not micro-manage, making well-informed decisions and standing
by those decisions through difficult times, the ability to manage conflict, and a focus on advocacy for students

Conclusions

1. The impact of a district’s decision to share a superintendent with another district can be positive on the leaders of both districts.

Every person interviewed in this study expressed a high degree of job satisfaction, with some of them even commenting that the shared superintendent arrangement was a contributing factor to an increase in job satisfaction. It was clear that they each understood and embraced their role in the organization and the responsibilities that come with that role. Few beyond the superintendents were able to cite any additional work that had been placed on them as a result of the sharing agreement, those that did were able to qualify those additional roles with caveats that illustrated that in their view the additional work was due to external pressures, such as state and federal legislation, rather than the decision to share a superintendent.

2. The challenges of the past to district leadership in a shared superintendent environment have been addressed.

Twenty years ago, the research found that there were three critical barriers to success in the shared superintendent role: the excessive workload that led to decreased job satisfaction, the ability to form and establish relationships needed to effectively lead, and the challenges of community involvement when serving multiple communities. Little
of that was apparent in this study. The superintendents had found techniques to manage the workload, the most important of which was their ability to delegate successfully and fairly. There was no evidence of any relationship problems between the superintendent and any interviewee, instead, from their responses it was clear that all respondents held their respective superintendents in the highest regard. In one of the shared situations, there was indication of some limited belief that the superintendent should be more visible in the communities, but this was mitigated by others in the districts who were willing to serve in that role of community liaison.

3 Shared superintendent arrangements can be long lasting when the motivation to share extends beyond the financial.

Both of the sharing situations in this study evolved for reasons beyond districts’ interests to improve finances. In fact, they each started because of the desire of decision-makers in disadvantaged districts to find an executive leader who could provide the knowledge and guidance they felt was needed to improve their districts. When their neighboring districts were willing to consider providing this help, the opportunity was accepted and has been ongoing ever since. Even though each agreement was over a half decade long at the time of the study, there was still a great measure of appreciation by the disadvantaged district for the help provided them by their sharing partner. This has created an environment in which some of the traditional problems of sharing an executive leader, such as concern by one district that their partner is receiving an excess of superintendent services, do not exist.
4 The shared superintendent arrangement does not have to impede the superintendent in his or her role as an instructional leader. None of the interviewees in this study had any criticisms of their respective superintendent as an instructional leader. Instead, in part due to the cost savings and financial incentives available because of the sharing arrangement, all four districts were able to support a building principal in each learning center. This model allowed them to place the focus for instructional leadership on those building principals, who in turn had each established committees of staff members to support them in these efforts. Because with this model the superintendents were not the focus of instructional leadership, this allowed them to concentrate their efforts on district wide “big picture” instructional issues and bring innovation to their districts through those means.

5 The shared superintendent arrangement can promote the work of the superintendent as a manager. Every interviewee indicated that the effectiveness of the superintendent as a manager was impacted in a positive way by the sharing arrangement. Both superintendents were praised for their work in this area, particularly by their supervisors and principals, who appreciated the combination of their superintendent’s ability to not be a micro-manager but to also be readily available whenever needed. This has impacted both sharing arrangements in another way in that they both are now sharing positions beyond just the superintendent. This has allowed for economy of service for all districts.
in this study and has had the additional benefit of the districts’ abilities to take advantage of added sharing incentives offered by the state of Iowa.

6 Participants in this study recommend a shared superintendent arrangement to other districts, with certain job-specific caveats.

All 23 interviewees said that they would recommend that other districts consider entering into a shared superintendent arrangement. However, almost all of them also added some job-specific caveats to their recommendation. For example, both superintendents emphasized that quality principals were integral to the success of these arrangements. Business managers emphasized the necessity for partner business managers in the shared district for help and support. Board presidents emphasized the important of their role in helping their respective communities understand that the superintendent’s emphasis is on the education of the community’s children, and in this dual role would not have time to be active in the community itself. When probed, many interviewees opined that they felt their particular shared superintendent situation was somewhat unique, and that it would take a similar set of personalities and circumstances to replicate the successes they were having. But they were equally passionate about the likelihood of that possibility, several respondents went so far as to offer their help and expertise to any districts considering this type of shared superintendent arrangement.
7 Certain abilities and skills are necessary for the success of a shared superintendent arrangement.

Respondents noted with emphasis that this arrangement is very much person-dependent, there must be a skill set already in place before taking on this challenge. The ability to communicate well, hire wisely, and delegate appropriately were high on the list of necessary skills for most interviewees. Additional qualities and knowledge desired included a strong background in finance, knowing the difference between stakeholders’ needs and wants, a strong sense of fair play, great organizational and time management skills, the ability to trust and be trusted, a tendency to not micro-manage, making well-informed decisions and standing by those decisions through difficult times, the ability to manage conflict, and a focus on advocacy for students.

Reflections

The results and conclusions of this study show that a shared superintendent arrangement can be very beneficial to the learning communities that are served by this initiative. Advantages can far outweigh disadvantages, district leaders can be highly effective in their work, and district goals can be achieved. At the same time these accomplishments are occurring, districts can save precious dollars that can then be reinvested in other important educational initiatives, such as technology and facilities, which will continue to promote the cycle of improvement, as illustrated in these case studies. For these reasons, it is important that legislators in the state of Iowa continue to support this model with sharing incentives that encourage these types of arrangements.
and provide the people they represent the initiative to consider whether this shared executive leader format will serve their communities as well as it does those in this study.

It is equally important to emphasize, however, that the operative word in that last paragraph is "can," and that a shared superintendent arrangement is by no means a panacea for educational reform. Granted, this research has shown that this arrangement works well in the learning communities in this study, but one need only look at the limitations of this study to understand just how rare that is. Of the 359 districts in the state of Iowa at the time of the research, the researcher was only able to find these two arrangements that met the limitations of the study—the same person shared by the same districts for more than five years. If the limitations also equate to success of a shared superintendent arrangement, the fact that less than 2% of the districts in the state of Iowa are "successful" by this measure is strong indication that the achievements of the districts in this study are extremely unusual. It was not a goal of this research to try to uncover why the longevity of these arrangements is uncommon, but the fact that it is so very rare should be a cautionary factor when districts consider sharing their superintendents.

Not only are long-lasting shared superintendent arrangements extremely rare, judging by the experiences of these two districts, they are also hard-earned. For example, even though Districts A and B did not seem to experience many growing pains at the outset of their agreement, most leaders interviewed mentioned that some community members, even after a decade, are concerned over the lack of the presence of the superintendent in their community activities. Even though board members take the lead
in justifying this, and other leaders, such as building principals, fill in this gap, some
stakeholders cannot get beyond the issue that they do not see ‘their’ superintendent in
vibrant activities in their community on a regular basis. It seems predictable that many
other communities would feel the same way if the demands of the sharing agreement
made it impossible for the superintendent to remain an active part of the community.

There are signs that the path to a successful sharing arrangement was also a
challenge for Districts C and D, and some underlying difficulties remain after more than
six years. For example, most leaders in those districts were able to recall how difficult it
was for members of their respective communities to support sending students to their
partner community at the beginning of the whole grade sharing agreement, the catalyst
which led to the superintendent sharing agreement. Some leaders are frustrated as to why
these efforts have not led to a merger between the two districts. Additionally, many
interviewed in these districts expressed angst about trying to replace their current
superintendent when he decides to retire. They understand that they have an exceptional
leader who has been able to maximize the capabilities of two very diverse communities.
They also understand how rare this kind of leader is, and possibly how tenuous the
relationship between the two districts is if the current superintendent is removed from the
equation.

Ultimately, it is the opinion of the researcher that three common critical factors
exist in the two sharing arrangements in this study that have provided for both the
longevity of the agreements and the fact that they have been able to keep the same person
in place for an extended period of time. Absent any one of these common critical factors, the challenges to a successful shared superintendent arrangement, as defined by the limitations of this study, would be incredibly difficult to overcome.

The first is that the evolution of both agreements was catalyzed by school board recognition of one of the districts that they needed to replace their current executive leader. They ascertained that the leadership of the neighboring district was what was needed in their district, and they were willing to make concessions in order to be able to bring that leader into their system. In turn, the neighboring district and the neighboring district’s superintendent were willing to help out in this way. The fact that one district was so willing to help the other at the beginning of the arrangement has created an ongoing sense of gratitude from the district in need, while at the same time it has created an ongoing sense of altruism with the partner district. As a result, none of the districts ever intentionally exploit their partners, all understand that this arrangement is critical to the success of their respective districts. If a potential sharing agreement is not catalyzed by this “dependence-support” relationship and the positive feelings that result from it, it is clearly possible that the long-term success of the arrangement might be challenged.

A second common critical factor to the success of both of these arrangements is that the skills and abilities of the superlative superintendents in this study match the needs of the districts they serve. In almost 20 hours of interviewing, not one criticism was offered of either superintendent by any of the leaders interviewed. Instead, they spoke of how their superintendents communicated effectively, managed efficiently, and motivated
constantly Only the superintendents themselves expressed that they wished they could accomplish more for the districts they serve. Both superintendents, from the outset of their employment as a shared superintendent, made it clear what they could and could not do within the constraints of this role, and have never wavered from their determination to abide by the parameters of their initial stipulations. Superintendents at a level of those in this study are rare, their learning communities have been wise to make sure that conditions exist that allow their superintendents to maximize their talents and gain a tremendous job satisfaction from the work that they do. However, if the shared superintendent is not capable of the level of leadership of those in this study, and very few are, then the longevity of the sharing agreement will always be in doubt.

Not only are the superintendents of the highest quality, but so are the other leaders in the districts in this study, which is the third common critical factor to their success. Virtually everyone interviewed expressed a high degree of job satisfaction, additionally, they all were complimentary of each other's work. It is a testament to their commitment to their students that all are able to focus on the greater good while constantly challenging themselves and each other to improve. They very much represent the notion that a team is greater than the sum of its parts. On the other hand, principals, business managers, board presidents, and other supervisors of the caliber of those in this study are almost as rare as the superintendents in these districts. Absent a strong team of leaders like the ones in Districts A, B, C, and D, who are able to fill in the gaps in work that are generally denoted to the superintendent, it is also unlikely that any kind of shared superintendent agreement would be long-lasting.
Therefore, if the sharing arrangement is not undertaken with the commitment of both partners that it is critical to the success of their districts, if they do not have a superlative superintendent to maximize district resources, and if they do not have exceptional leaders willing to sacrifice self-interest for the greater good, a successful, ongoing sharing arrangement will likely not be attainable.

Can a shared superintendent arrangement be successful? The results of this study show that the answer to that question is yes. Should all districts consider moving to this type of executive leader format? Only if those three factors are in place, and only if the boards of education of the considering districts feel it is in the best interests of their students to do so. Whereas legislators should continue to provide the incentives for districts to consider a shared superintendent arrangement, mandating that districts do it would make no sense in a state that has provided outstanding education to its students for many decades while honoring the notion of local control in making these types of decisions.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

Because the decision to share an executive leader is such a critical one for school districts who are considering this arrangement, more research into this topic is warranted so that decision-makers in those districts have even more information at their disposal. Recommended topics for further research include
None of the districts in this case study is discussing with any seriousness the possibility of moving to a merger. In fact, Districts A and B seem to have no interest in even examining the possibility of whole grade sharing in the near future. In contrast, Decker, Talbot, and McCumsey's (1990, 1991) research proved that shared superintendent arrangements only work if the sharing districts are doing so in effort to move toward whole grade sharing and eventual merger. Even though that no longer seems to be the case, perhaps because districts now heed the warnings they offered 20 years ago, the body of research will be of even more value if districts have the means to find out how a shared superintendent initiative can successfully bring two districts together in a merger.

Although challenging in nature, the body of research on shared superintendents would be well-served if studies were conducted on shared superintendent arrangements between districts that were apparently unsuccessful due to their brevity. Although no prior direction was plotted, this dissertation ultimately concluded that this arrangement was working well in the districts that participated in the study. However, much could be learned from those situations which did not last and were thus apparently unsuccessful. When contrasted with the research in this dissertation, districts considering this option would have considerable information on both what works and what does not.
3  **Shared superintendent arrangements which are ongoing, but where there is constant change in the executive leader**

It can be theorized that constant change in a district’s educational leader is not beneficial for the education of the students of that district. It can further be theorized that if the superintendent of the district is constantly changing, there must be a climate and culture in the district that does not promote job satisfaction. This would be multiplied in a shared superintendent situation. As with number two above, this would be challenging research due to the sensitivity of the districts in being unable to retain their educational leaders for any workable length of time, but the research would also be quite valuable for other districts which would not want to find themselves in this situation, and perhaps for the challenged districts themselves as they try to find ways to move forward with the education of their students.
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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
HUMAN PARTICIPANT'S REVIEW
INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title  Shared Superintendency in Iowa: an Investigation of Organizational Perceptions of Supervisors in Districts That Employ a Shared Superintendent

Name of Investigator(s)  Roark R Horn

Invitation to Participate  You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

Nature and Purpose  Due to declining enrollment and the budgetary concerns that come with that, school districts across the state and across the nation are searching to find ways to balance educational needs with decreasing funding. One consideration for districts, and a consideration promoted by Iowa law through supplemental weighting, is to look at the viability of sharing a superintendent with a neighboring district or districts. The purpose of this study is to research the effect this decision and this arrangement has on the leaders of the district and the cost versus value of sharing a superintendent between districts.

Explanation of Procedures  As a leader in your district, you have been selected as a potential participant in this study. If you choose to participate, the investigator will meet with you at a date and place of your convenience and ask a series of predetermined questions. Some probing of answers may occur. This interview will be recorded digitally and transcribed at a later date. It is anticipated that the interview will take no longer than one hour. Once the study is completed, the investigator will erase the transcript of the interview and, upon request, you will receive a copy of the major findings of the study.
Discomfort and Risks  Risks to participation are minimal, you will be one of approximately 25 people to be interviewed for this study. Risks to participation are similar to those experienced in day-to-day life. There are no foreseeable risks to participation.

Benefits and Compensation  No participant will receive any kind of direct benefit or compensation for this study.

Confidentiality  Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. Tapes and transcripts of interviews will be kept in a locked file cabinet. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw  Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Questions  If you have questions about the study or desire information in the future regarding your participation or the study, you can contact Roark Horn at 319-988-2008 or the project investigator’s faculty advisor Robert Decker at the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education, University of Northern Iowa 319-273-2605. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

Agreement

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.
[NOTE THAT ONE COPY OF THE ENTIRE CONSENT DOCUMENT (NOT JUST THE AGREEMENT STATEMENT) MUST BE RETURNED TO THE PI AND ANOTHER PROVIDED TO THE PARTICIPANT. SIGNED CONSENT FORMS MUST BE MAINTAINED FOR INSPECTION FOR AT LEAST 3 YEARS]
Reruitment Script for Participants in the research “Shared Superintendency in Iowa: An Investigation of Organizational Perceptions of Supervisors in Districts That Employ a Shared Superintendent”

Hi, my name is Roark Horn and I am conducting research into the phenomenon of shared superintendency. Decision-makers in your district have agreed to participate in this research and, as one of the leaders of the district, your input is vital to the success of this study, so I am asking for your help in this research.

The goal of the study is to find out how the experience of having a shared superintendent impacts the other leaders in the district. This goal will be pursued through the following research questions:

1) What are the motives for the decision to share a superintendent?
2) Do shared superintendents face similar challenges as their counterparts from 20 years ago?
3) Have the lessons learned from the prior research been heeded over the last two decades?
4) Are there new challenges facing shared superintendents today?
5) What impact on the roles of district leaders, if any, has resulted from the decision to share a superintendent?

Although I will not be asking those questions directly, I have a series of 12 questions that I will be asking that will lead to the answers to those questions. Because this study is categorized as “interpretive research,” I am allowed to probe your answers with follow-up questions to provide clarity to the study. Your answers will be digitally recorded, then transcribed, once the study is concluded both the recordings and the transcripts will be destroyed. At no time will you, your role in the district, or even the school district itself be identified in the dissertation or in any subsequent summary publication of the research.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable with the questioning you may terminate the interview, any information from any interview that does not reach conclusion will not be used in the study.
This research has the potential to impact any school leader, and therefore any student, in districts that are considering sharing their superintendents.

Thank you for your consideration – will you be willing to participate in this study?
Letter of Cooperation

Date 11/3/10

Dear [Superintendent]

In a follow-up to our conversation on July 16th, please accept this as a Letter of Cooperation wherein the District agrees to host on site interviews for my research on the topic “Shared Superintendency in Iowa: An Investigation of Organizational Perceptions of Supervisors in Districts That Employ a Shared Superintendent.”

As we discussed in our initial conversation, the research questions for this topic are:

1) What are the motives for the decision to share a superintendent?
2) Do shared superintendents face similar challenges as their counterparts from 20 years ago?
3) Have the lessons learned from the prior research been heeded over the last two decades?
4) Are there new challenges facing shared superintendents today?
5) What are the perceptions of the shared superintendent position of those who are directly affected by this organizational structure?

Although there is potentially little impact for your district in this research since you already share a superintendent, the potential impact of this research for other districts facing this decision is enormous. Your willingness to allow these interviews to be conducted on site will greatly facilitate this study. This will, in turn, help other districts with researched answers to help them make the best decision possible in regards to their choice of what kind of school leader structure can best help their students.

If you would like a more thorough overview of the study than what has been provided to you previously, please contact me at 319-XXX-XXXX or send me an email at rhorn@aea267.k12.ia.us. Otherwise, please let this document stand as a Letter of Cooperation that your district is willing to host the interviews needed for this research, with your signature at the bottom of the page signifying that understanding.

Sincerely,
Roark R Horn

[Superintendent signature] ____________________________