

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There were several case studies, articles and reports reviewed in relation to the two research questions presented in chapter one of this study. Key descriptors used to identify relevant empirical research studies in journal articles, government documents, books and commentary literature are Standards of Learning, No Child Left Behind, superintendency, accountability, and educational reform. Additionally, bibliographies from relevant dissertations and articles were used to identify potential resources. Research read and considered included 41 journal articles, eight books, 11 case studies, and three government documents. The method of retrieving the research information was through the following databases: Ovid, ERIC, and Wilson. The initial literature review was conducted to determine if any research studies had been conducted on the affect of the Standards of Learning and No Child Left Behind on the superintendency. While searches revealed that studies had been conducted on tenure, the role of the superintendent, and the applicant pool, there were no studies located that focused particularly on the affect of the SOLs and NCLB on the superintendency. Specifically, there were no studies found that considered the affect of the SOLs and NCLB on superintendents in Virginia.

The criteria to select research for this study included the following:

- Relevance to the research questions
- Empirical research studies that provided qualitative as well as quantitative findings on the status of the superintendency
- Quantitative studies that included large populations in order that the findings might be generalized to other situations
- Commentary literature within the last ten years

In this study, the area of the superintendency is presented in the context of case studies; however, as a result of conducting research literature review on the topic of No Child Left Behind which produced no empirical research, this literature review on NCLB relied on commentary literature from educational journals, books, and government documents. Likewise, commentary literature from educational journals and government documents were used for the SOL.

This chapter begins with a review of commentary literature on the topics of the Standards Movement, implications of the Standards of Learning and the No Child Left Behind Act followed by case studies on the superintendency. The organization of this chapter is as follows:

- The Standards Movement
- Implications of Standards of Learning and No Child Left Behind
- Case studies on the superintendency

The Standards Movement

The advent of standardized testing began approximately 150 years ago when Massachusetts administered the first standardized test (Sacks, 1999). Since that time, students have been subjected to a battery of different standardized tests including the "...Iowa and Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (ITBS & CTBS), and the Metropolitan, Stanford, and California Achievement Tests..." (Kohn, 1999, p. 74). In addition, many states have their own standardized tests (Hurt, 2003). For example, Illinois has the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), Texas administers the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Michigan has the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP) (Sacks, 1999), Florida has the Florida State Standards (FSS), Colorado administers the Colorado Model Content Standards (CMCS) (Hurt, 2003), and Virginia administers the Standards of Learning (SOL).

Though these tests are designed with good intentions, some critics of standardized tests describe them as a means to “de-skill” teachers (McNeil, 2000), and force a “dumbed-down” curriculum (Dounay, 2000). Bracey (2003), an avid opponent of standardized testing, lists a host of items that standardized tests do not measure, and often inhibit: creativity, critical thinking, resilience, motivation, persistence, leadership, integrity, courage, and resourcefulness, among others (p. 31). Bracey (2003) also notes that test scores are not indicators of how well someone will succeed in life. In his book, *Standardized Minds*, Sacks (1999) shares a story of a young lady who was prohibited from graduating because she did not pass the state-required standardized test in mathematics. After three years and having tried many times, the young lady still did not pass the test and was paralyzed by the fact that, even though she did well in mathematics throughout school, her future was on hold because of one test.

Proponents of standardized testing present an entirely different viewpoint. Hess (2004) purports that standards bring about “tough-minded accountability” (p. 32). He explains that tough-minded accountability “requires public officials to set clear goals for schools, explain how performance will be measured, set out consequences for success and failure, and then step back and let educators educate” (p. 32). Hess goes on to advocate that goals, assessments, and consequences outlined by standards keep educators from “shrugging off disappointing outcomes” (p. 39).

While there is controversy and varying opinions regarding standardized testing, superintendents are held accountable for ensuring that state and federal standards are effectively implemented to promote student achievement, to close the achievement gap, and ultimately to produce high test scores.

Implications of Standards of Learning and No Child Left Behind

As stated in Chapter 1, the Virginia Standards of Learning was adopted in June 1995 and first administered in 1998. Virginia's state standards delineate what every student K-12 must minimally know and understand in English, mathematics, science, and history/social science (Thayer, 2000). There are; however, implications that the SOLs present for schools and school districts:

- High school students must pass end-of-course tests and earn a specific number of verified credits or they will not graduate, regardless of whether they passed the related course (effective 2004).
- Test scores for students in grades 3, 5, and 8 are to be considered when determining promotion.
- Schools that do not meet the pass-rate requirement risk lose of accreditation (effective 2006-2007) (Thayer, 2000).

The SOLs have been criticized for promoting rote learning and placing too much emphasis on factual material (Dounay, 2000; O'Neill, 2000). Pasi (2000) suggests that due to the SOLs, the core of teaching may be lost, which is to prepare students to problem-solve, think, and contribute positively to society. On the other hand, Ivy Main (2000), a parent, notes that the SOLs have forced schools to focus on overall student academic performance. In 2000, Pasi (2000) noted that parents and students did not feel the same sense of urgency that teachers and administrators felt, but in 2004, when the stakes are higher (for high school seniors) attitudes may change. The year 2004 has arrived and perhaps the fall out from those who did not graduate because of a lack of verified credits has just begun to be felt and examined.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act which became law on January 8, 2002, outlines the federal government's plan to increase educational standards nationally. Virginia has aligned its state standards with the tenets of NCLB. The priorities of NCLB seek to

1. Increase accountability for student performance
2. Focus on what works
3. Reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility
4. Empower parents (U.S. House Document 107-34)

However, like the Virginia SOL, NCLB imposes implications for schools and school divisions:

- Schools that fail to show adequate yearly progress (AYP) for disadvantaged students may lose Title I funding after three years (U.S. House Document 107-34, p. 8)
- If a state does not meet its performance objectives, federal funding for administrative expenses may be reduced (U.S. House Document 107-34, p. 10)
- Parents/students have the option to choose another school if their school is under an improvement plan for a second year. This could cause overcrowding in the receiving school and could lead to other expenses for the school district (i.e. hiring additional personnel, building expansion, etc.)
- Under NCLB, K-8 is considered elementary, and testing for grades 3 through 8 is required (effective 2005-2006). The costs to purchase additional tests (for grades 4, 6, and 7) are to be incurred by the school division. Virginia; however, has agreed to absorb the costs of the additional tests.

- Title I schools that are out of compliance for three or more years risk certain sanctions, including:
 - ◆ School division must offer supplemental educational services at school division's expense
 - ◆ State has the option to close the school, or replace the entire or part of the staff.

In the first chapter of his book, *On the Death of Childhood and the Destruction of Public Schools*, Bracey (2003) strongly criticizes the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. He refers to the Act as a “trap” (p. 1) and a set-up for the failure of public schools. He states that the provisions outlined by NCLB are “impossible-to-meet” (p. 2) and that AYP is also difficult, if not impossible, for schools to attain simultaneously for each of the seven categories (special education; limited English proficiency; race: black, white, Hispanic; economically disadvantaged; and all students). Mathis (2003) concurs with this thinking. He states simply, “There is no body of knowledge that says that all students and all subgroups of students can reach meaningful high standards, at the required AYP pace, ...” (p. 683).

In addition, Bracey (2003) points out that, although the federal government promised to provide funding for NCLB, they have been slow to do so. According to Mathis (2003), superintendent of schools in Brandon, Vermont, there needs to be an increase in public spending for K-12 education of \$84 billion to \$148 billion in order to fund NCLB. That is a 20% to 35% increase, respectively, over the amount spent in 2001-2002 of \$422.7 billion (Mathis, 2003).

Figure 2 below gives a schematic view of the implications that the SOL and NCLB have in common as well as those that are independent.

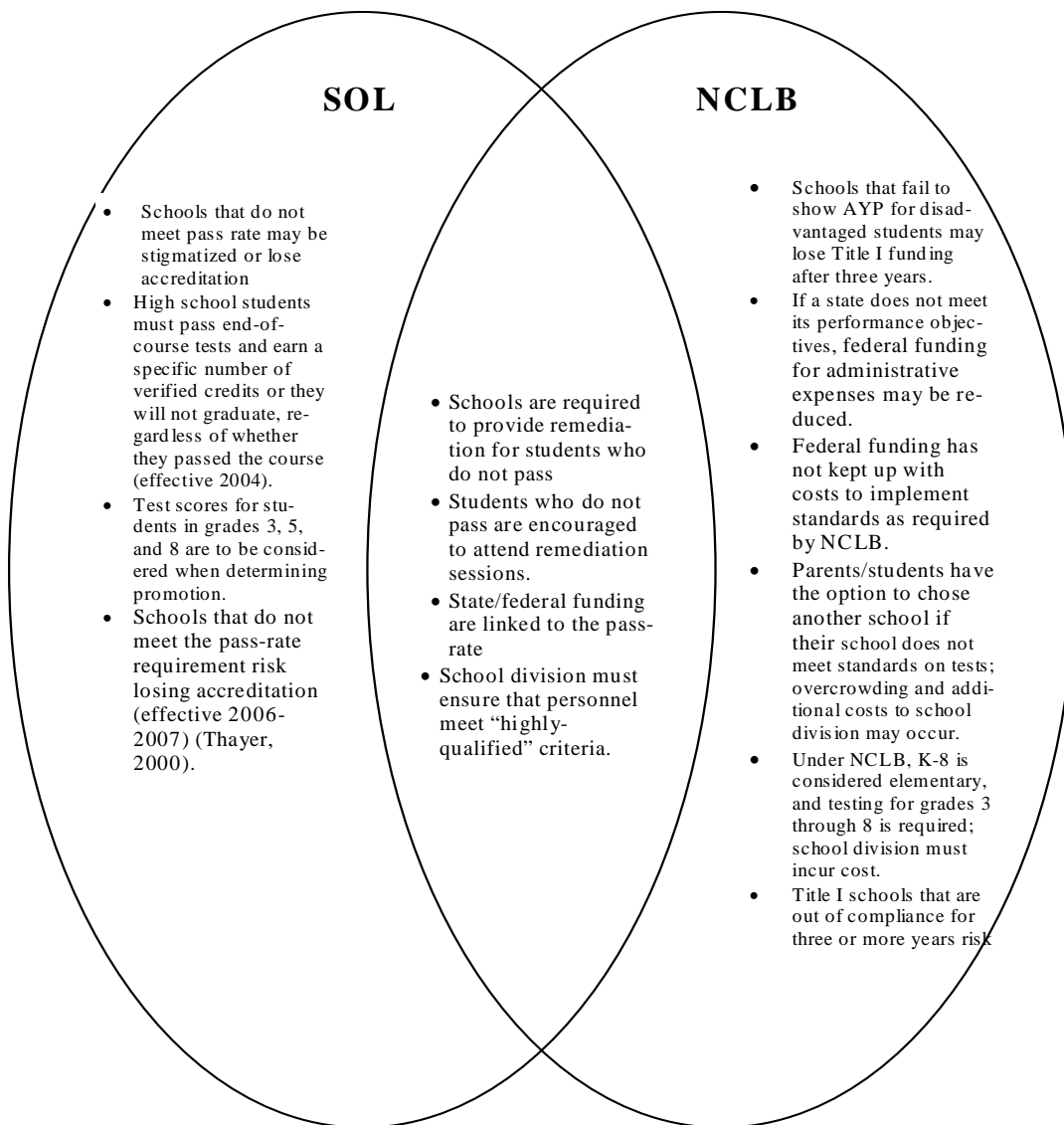


Figure 2. Implications of SOLs and NCLB

Studies on the Superintendency

The responsibility to ensure successful implementation of both the SOL and NCLB rests upon the shoulders of the local superintendent. Whether state or federal funding actually is provided has no bearing on whether these provisions must be successfully implemented. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to continue to manage the day-to-day operations of the division while staying abreast of the many changes that the SOL and NCLB send down the pipeline. This added pressure on the superintendent along with the responsibility to serve as instructional leader, manager, community liaison, politician, and more may be why, as research indicates, that the average tenure for superintendents is only five to six years (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, and Ghosh (2002). The case studies that follow consider the superintendency in relation to tenure.

Thomas Glass, Lars Björk, and C. Cyrss Brunner conducted a study entitled, *The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency*. This study was conducted under the auspices of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and is a follow-up to the previous ten-year studies. The ten-year studies began in 1920 and were initially sponsored by the National Education Association's Department of Superintendence. The AASA began conducting the studies after World War II.

The 2000 study is comprehensive and covers a wide-range of areas concerning the superintendency. Areas of study include personal characteristics, professional experience, superintendent/school board relations, and professional preparation, among others. The researchers outlined four objectives for this study:

1. To provide current information on the superintendency to national, state, and local education policymakers, the media, and superintendents themselves.

2. To provide trend data that can be compared to studies conducted in 1960, 1971, 1982, and 1992.
3. To provide an overview of public education from the perspective of its executive leaders.
4. To provide researchers with data and analyses about public education and the superintendent leaders in the 1990s who will lead American public school districts into the 21st century (Glass, et al., 2000, pp. 9-10).

The researchers determined that there are 12,604 “regular public school districts” (p.10), and of that population a random sample of 5,336 superintendents was chosen to participate in the study. The survey instrument for the 2000 study was developed by AASA staff and the researchers. Items from the 1992 study were largely used for the 2000 study and items from the 1982 study were used to develop the 1992 survey instrument. The use of previous ten-year study survey items was incorporated in order to provide comparative data.

The survey was mailed to the participants and there was a 42.4% (2,262) rate of return. Data from the returned surveys was analyzed using Social Science Statistical Package software and was disaggregated by total response group, enrollment strata, gender, and minority categories. Both simple percentage and cross-tabulation were used to present the findings. These are the only two methods of data analysis mentioned. Because this study is so broad and covers many factors, it would be difficult to summarize the complete list of findings; therefore, I will encapsulate those pertinent to the issues of this paper.

Regarding superintendent tenure, Glass, et al. (2000), determined that the mean tenure for superintendents is five to six years, not 2.5 years as was commonly thought. The researchers cite several contributing factors to the five to six year length of a superintendent’s tenure: a spouse

who has a career, inability to transfer retirement (to another state), and high ratings from their board. According to the findings, 69% of respondents indicated that their evaluations by the board were “excellent,” while 22% reported receiving a rating of “good” from their board. Meanwhile, 95% of superintendents surveyed rated their own effectiveness as “excellent or good” (p. iv), seemingly agreeing with board ratings. On the other hand, superintendents did not rate their boards highly. The data showed that 3 out of 10 superintendents felt that their board was unqualified.

The level of “considerable” or “very great” stress felt by superintendents in the 2000 study increased nearly 10% for “considerable” stress and over 40% for “very great” stress in comparison to the 1992 study. Superintendents were asked about factors that inhibit their effectiveness. Topping the chart in this area are: inadequate financing of schools (85.1%), too many insignificant demands (68.2%), board micromanagement (48%), and state reform mandates (43.3%). Difficult relations with board members; however, was cited by only 9.6% of respondents. Superintendent salaries were also addressed in this study. It was noted that the size and wealth of a district determine the compensation package of the superintendent. Glass, et al. (2000), further noted that compensation packages could be complicated and include not only the contract salary, but also state retirement, annuities, housing allowance, vehicle allowance, life insurance, and more; thus, making the exact dollar amount illusive. For this reason, salary amounts were not requested for this study.

With the information delineated above and a multitude of other data, Glass, et al. (2000), concluded that while problems and challenges exist in the superintendency, the position “continues to be a very functional position in public education” (p. ix), that superintendents are happy with their career choice(s), and they would recommend the superintendency to others.

There are some areas that the researchers noted that require further study. Regarding superintendent stress levels, they stated that it was difficult to determine whether the stress levels reported (“considerable” and “very great”) affected job performance. In addition, further study on superintendent compensation packages was recommended.

Although this study is quite comprehensive and covers a multitude of areas concerning the superintendency, there are a few areas left untouched. For example, while the study provides information on superintendent tenure, it does not seek to determine the reasons that superintendents leave their position to go to another school division or to retire.

In a study entitled *Predicting and Modeling Superintendent Turnover*, Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, and Ghosh (2002) sought to dispel the myth of the “revolving-door superintendency,” and determine reasons for superintendent turnover. They first sought to establish whether there is actually a crisis to fill the superintendency and if the tenure of superintendents is only 2.5 years as is commonly cited (Johnston, 2000). Natkin, et al., cites several studies that determined the mean tenure for superintendents is greater than 2.5 years. A study conducted by Yee and Cuban (1996) determined that the mean tenure for superintendents in 1990 was 5.76 years. Glass (2000) determined that superintendents serve an average of six years in office. These studies severely contradict the Johnston statistic regarding length of superintendent tenure.

In their study, Natkin, et al. (2002), sought to determine average superintendent tenure, the relationship between tenure and district demographics, activities of the school board and their effect on superintendent tenure, and the effect of superintendent’s level of education on his/her tenure. The study involved a national random sample of districts as well as all North Carolina school districts. A survey entitled *Superintendent Longevity and Time Study (SLATS)* was

developed for the study. The researchers had a return rate of 81% (95 out of 117) from North Carolina districts and 42.6% (197 out of 462) from the national sample. Some school divisions had one or more superintendents who provided feedback. For example, large school divisions with several area superintendents returned a survey for each superintendent. All of the feedback was factored into the study totaling 892 cases. The researchers used the Cox Proportional Hazard regression survival analysis model to analyze the data. There was no information on who developed the Cox model or how it was tested.

From their data, Natkin, et al. (2002), determined the following:

1. average tenure for superintendents from 1975 to 1994 was six to seven years, thus, supporting the findings of Yee & Cuban (1996);
2. community support (or lack thereof) for school construction play a role in superintendent turnover (it was not determined whether a lack of support for school construction was an indication of superintendent's leadership credibility; further research in this area was suggested);
3. the involvement of school board members in management activities was a "major irritant" for superintendents and cited as a reason for shorter tenure;
4. district poverty level (based on free-reduced lunch numbers) played a role in the rate of superintendent turnover (those with 0-19% free-reduced—average 8.5 years, while 80-99% free-reduced—average 5.5 to 6.5 years); and
5. the superintendent's level of education played a role in length of tenure, those with higher level degrees (Master's and Doctorate) stay longer.

This study also determined that there are some non-significant factors regarding superintendent turnover, they include the superintendent's age at the beginning of his/her

contract, gender, district size, demographic setting, size of school board, school board member turnover, and internal versus external recruitment.

The data show that this study debunks the myth of the “revolving-door superintendency.” They recommend several future research options for further inquiry into superintendent turnover. For example, this study determined that school board member involvement in administrative matters affect superintendent turnover. The authors recommend a study that would determine precisely what behaviors and to what extent the involvement must occur in order to lead to superintendent turnover. Additionally, the authors note that community support (or lack thereof) for construction as well as the poverty level of the district also play a role in superintendent turnover. They suggest that future researchers could delve in a more in-depth manner into what lack of community support means in relation to superintendent’s perceived leadership abilities and determine at what level of poverty is the highest amount of turnover noted.

Raymond O’Connell (2000) conducted a study called, *A Longitudinal Study of Applicants for the Superintendency*, which assessed the quality of superintendent applicant pools in the state of New York. In this study, he surveyed superintendent search consultants also referred to as “gatekeepers.” He sought to determine whether the size or quality of the applicant pool for the superintendency changed from 1995 to 1999; what factors significantly correlate with the size of the applicant pool; whether there was gender bias during the selection process; and whether consultants changed their recruitment strategies to address projected shortages of applicants.

This study was supported by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS). NYSCOSS handled the actual mailing of the *Superintendent Search Survey*, a 32 item survey which was mailed to all active (63) superintendent search consultants in the state of New York. Responses yielded a 60.3% rate of return. The survey sent out in 1999 contained the

same questions as the 1995 survey along with additional questions to explore areas not adequately addressed in the 1995 survey. Each time respondents were asked to provide information based on their most recent searches.

The 1995 survey was conducted to provide a baseline for the longitudinal study. It was determined that 70% of the superintendent search consultants were concerned about the size and quality of the applicant pools. The study also determined that women and minorities were underrepresented, and that districts that offered higher salaries attracted a greater number of applicants.

From his 1999 study, O'Connell determined that larger starting salaries attracted larger applicant pools and a greater number of high quality applicants. The study also revealed that the lower socioeconomic districts (as determined by free-reduced lunch statistics) were less able to attract a large number of applicants, perhaps because of their inability to offer higher salaries. The number of districts that required residency dropped from 61.5% in 1995 to 48.3% in 1999. The researcher suggested that some boards have dropped the residency requirement in order to attract more candidates. Those districts that required residency attracted 23.6 applicants while those that did not require residency attracted 31.6 applicants. The number of school divisions that were willing to extend the search process in order to seek additional candidates dropped from 19.2% in 1995 to 17.2% in 1998. Districts did not believe that they would attract additional applicants and that extending the search could cause them to lose candidates in whom they were interested.

The study also considered the total applicant pool for each survey period. The researcher determined that while the total applicant pool declined by 31%, the number of highly qualified applicants stayed the same. O'Connell proposed that the stability of the number of highly

qualified applicants may be due to consultants that look for applicants with traditional profiles rather than expanding the profile to consider other traits. Criteria to determine what constitutes a highly qualified applicant were not delineated in the study.

In the 1999 survey, it was noted that 57.1% of the consultants said that they changed their search procedures, whereas in 1995 only 7.7% said that they planned to change their procedures. Some sought to be more aggressive in their recruitment by contacting potential applicants directly and encouraging them to apply, advertising more extensively, and exerting more effort to seek out female and minority candidates. Others simply shifted their paradigm, became more directive with the board, and tried to protect candidates from public review until finalists are named.

O'Connell concluded from his study that the applicant pool in New York state is diminishing in both size and quality. For future research on this subject, O'Connell recommends that information be collected for all superintendent searches across the state of New York not just those conducted via search consultants. He also recommends that it would be noteworthy to determine why certified and experienced minority and women administrators are not applying for superintendency positions in greater numbers.

O'Connell did not disclose how the survey instrument was validated or if it was validated; additionally, he did not reveal the method(s) used to analyze the data. Therefore, there may be a threat to the internal validity of this study because of the pre-existing difference between the two groups (1995 and 1999) surveyed. O'Connell advised the reader that the respondents to the two surveys were different. In addition, in 1995 Goals 2000 was relatively new, whereas, in 1999 the reform efforts of Goals 2000 were on the decline. Lack of disclosure could impose upon the integrity of the study or somehow affect the results.

In this age of accountability, is the superintendency still an attractive position to those in the education profession? This is the question Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) sought to answer in their study entitled, *Career Crisis in the School Superintendency?* The researchers utilized a survey instrument called the *Superintendents' Professional Expectations and Advancement Review (SPEAR™)*. They credit the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) with assisting in the shaping of the survey and insuring its validity. The researchers did not explain how validation of the survey instrument was determined.

The survey was mailed by the American Association of School Administrators to a random sample of 2,979 of the nation's superintendents. The survey was a questionnaire and respondents were asked to rate their responses on a likert scale of 1 to 5. Five indicated that the respondent strongly agreed and one equaled strongly disagree. The rate of return was 57.7%.

Cooper, et al. (2000), found that most superintendents (88%) believe that there is a shortage of applicants for the superintendency. Even though the respondents indicated that they were satisfied in their career and would recommend the superintendency to aspiring administrators, there was great concern about whether the next generation would be willing to accept the responsibilities that come with the job. A separate study indicated that building level administrators have looked at the dynamics of the superintendency and the personal costs involved and say, "No thank you" (*Phi Delta Kappan Fastback*, 2003).

While many of the respondents in the study conducted by Cooper, et al. (2000) indicated that they would consider a "good job" in another district (small districts – 55.5%; larger districts – 45.9%), they are also concerned about the high rate of turnover among superintendents. In addition, superintendents expressed concerns about the lack of mobility regarding pensions. The

study showed that 86% of the superintendents are vested in their current state and feel constrained because their pension is not transferable to other states.

Other findings include: professional concerns – better pay and benefits (90% claim that higher pay and benefits are incentives for potential superintendents), more professional development (74% want more training); personal concerns – job satisfaction (91% express real satisfaction in their career, while only 65% said that they would recommend the job to others), student impact (96% say their work has made a significant impact on students); and skill set – human and community (99% say they possess high interpersonal skills, 93% good community relations skill, 65% good race relations), general skills (building construction 89%, labor relations 87%, curriculum design 82%, finance/budget 97%).

Based on their study results, the researchers make several recommendations to improve the attractiveness of the superintendency. A sample of these recommendations is listed below:

1. Reorganize the superintendency (offer more support, clearer expectations, and better pay)
2. Make pensions more portable
3. Expand and improve doctoral programs
4. Increase opportunities for women and minorities
5. Value, recognize, and reward superintendents' contributions

While the researchers list ways to enhance the allure of the superintendency, they do not offer any recommendations on additional studies in this area.

The findings of Glass (2001) seem to parallel the findings of the Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella study. In an issue paper commissioned by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), Glass (2001) considered the types of policy changes that might attract more

superintendent applicants. In the study Glass (2001) surveyed elected and appointed chief state school officers (37), state executive directors of the American Association of School Administrators (42), and the state executive directors of the National School Board Associations (31). The following information was revealed: 1) a superintendent applicant pool crisis exists; 2) a lack of quality superintendent applications was particularly noted in rural, urban and poor districts; 3) the quality of superintendent applications is decreasing; and 4) practicing superintendents in the states represented by the respondents are either “effective” or “very effective” (Glass, 2001). In addition, this study considered the types of policy changes that might attract more applicants. The findings indicate that the following factors may have a positive effect: higher pay, portable pensions, community support, and paid internships.

Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) did not provide any information on how and what methods were used to analyze, disaggregate, or correlate their findings. Other studies provided this information, some in detail. Glass (2000) noted that the Cooper, et al. (2000), study was skewed toward large districts. With this in mind it may be difficult to generalize the findings to superintendents in smaller districts.

Summary of Commentary and Studies

While the SOL and NCLB have many supporters and opponents, both reform efforts appear to be here to stay. Therefore, it is necessary that educators make plans to accept them and adapt. Bracey and Mathis, as well as the other opponents of standardized testing, make legitimate points supported by research; however, supporters of reform and accountability measures also make their point backed by research. Thus, superintendents must be able to implement the provisions of the law in the best way possible for their communities.

While the case studies presented are different and focus on different aspects of the superintendency, several common themes were found among them. For example, two studies examined determined that nationally there is a superintendent applicant pool crisis, and higher pay would attract more applicants (Cooper, et al., 2000; O'Connell, 2000). Studies conducted by Glass (2000) and Cooper, et al. (2000) found that allowing portable pensions might lead to an increase in superintendent applicants. The involvement of board members in school management was determined to affect superintendent effectiveness or tenure in both Glass' (2000) study and the study conducted by Natkin, et al. (2000). Meanwhile, O'Connell (2000) found in his study that districts with high poverty were less able to attract superintendent applicants and Natkin, et al. (2000) found that districts with high poverty experience greater superintendent turnover.

These studies did not specifically relate to the applicant pool crisis, the lack of qualified superintendent applicants, and the superintendent turnover rate to the level of accountability superintendents must endure; however, it is important to determine if these crises exist. In my study I intend to determine if there is a linkage between increased accountability, and superintendent tenure in the Commonwealth of Virginia.