

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF STUDY, SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Overview

This study was designed to determine if there is a relationship between the increased accountability with state and federal mandates, in particular SOLs and NCLB, and Other Influences on superintendent tenure in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This chapter presents a summary of the study, a summary of the findings, implications, recommendations for future studies, limitations, and reflections.

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect, if any, of increased accountability in light of current state and federal initiatives (i.e. Standards of Learning, and No Child Left Behind) and Other Influences on the tenure of superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The data answered the following research questions:

- (1) What is the relationship, if any, between the Standards of Learning and the tenure of superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
- (2) What is the relationship, if any, between No Child Left Behind and the tenure of superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
- (3) What is the relationship, if any, of Other Influences on the superintendent tenure?

The data received from superintendents in Virginia were entered into SPSS and disaggregated by age, gender, race, years of experience as superintendent, number of years as superintendent in current district, enrollment, AYP status, and number of schools in respondent's district. The 35-question survey was divided into three sections: Part I – SOL items and NCLB items, Part II – Other Influences items and Part III – Demographic information. The ten SOL

items, ten NCLB items, six Other Influences items, and demographic items were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Simple percentages, cross tabulations using chi-square, and frequency distributions were used to present findings.

Summary of Findings

The population of this study included 132 superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Of the 132 surveys that were mailed via United States Postal Service, initially 94 were returned representing a 71% return rate. Follow-up calls were made to superintendents who had not responded to the survey by the deadline resulting in the return of five additional surveys. A total of 99 surveys were returned resulting in a final return rate of 75%.

The demographical data collected in the study indicated that the majority of the respondents were 51 or older (81.8%) and 18.2% were between the ages of 41 and 50, which indicates that respondents are not novices, rather they are experienced educators. Longevity affords them the ability to have a perspective that encompasses pre- and post- SOLs and NCLB.

The largest percentage of respondents were male (70.7%), 25.3% were female, and 4% did not indicate their gender. Eighty-one respondents were Caucasian (81.8%), 12 were African-American (12.1%), one was Asian (1%), and five did not indicate race (5.1%). These two statistics indicate that administration at the superintendent level in the Commonwealth of Virginia is predominately Caucasian males.

The data indicate that 87.9% of the superintendents who responded have been in their current district for ten years or less, 7.1% have been in their district between 11 and 15 years, and 5% have been in their district for 16 or more years. The majority of respondents have been in their current district for 10 years or less. This parallels studies by Natkin, et al. (2002) and Glass (2000) which indicate that superintendents serve an average of six years in office.

In addition, 85.9% of respondents had 15 or less years of experience as a superintendent, and 14.1% had 16 or more years as a superintendent. Over half (59.6%) of the respondents were in districts with student enrollment of 1,000 to 4,000 which is an accurate representation of Virginia School districts. According to the 2002 census, 60% of school districts have enrollment less than 4000 (VDOE, School Census, 2002). Finally, the data show that 70.7% of respondents indicated that their school district did not make AYP.

Summary of Findings by Research Question

This study sought to determine whether the SOLs and NCLB have an effect on superintendent tenure. The results answer three of the research questions. A summary of the findings is delineated below. The data were disaggregated by age, race, gender, years of experience as a superintendent, number of years as superintendent in current district, student enrollment, number of schools within the district, and district AYP status.

What is the relationship, if any, between the Standards of Learning and the tenure of superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

The superintendents who responded indicated that the SOLs have had a positive impact on education in Virginia as evidenced by 95% of the respondents. When disaggregated by race, 95% of Caucasians, 100% of African-Americans, 100% of Asians indicated that SOLs have had a positive influence on education in Virginia. In addition, data disaggregated by gender revealed that 94% of males and 100% of females view SOLs as having a positive effect on education.

Superintendents indicated that the SOLs are not a factor in their tenure. This is evidenced by 94% of respondents who revealed that they have not considered leaving the education profession as a result of the SOLs, and 90% who noted that SOLs have not influenced their decision to retire earlier than they originally planned. As evidenced by data disaggregated by

years of experience, at least 90% of superintendents at each level of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 30+) revealed that they have not considered leaving the education profession as a result of the SOLs. Also, at least 80% of the superintendents at each level of experience indicated that the SOLs will not influence their decision to retire earlier than they originally planned.

Superintendents noted that SOLs do not interfere with day-to-day operations, as evidenced by 86% of respondents who indicated that the SOLs do not interfere with what they should be doing as a superintendent. Also, as evidenced by 99% of respondents, superintendents are not deterred from the superintendency as a result of the SOLs. This finding is also supported by a national study conducted by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) which found that 91% of superintendents surveyed were satisfied with their career choice and 65% would recommend the job to others.

On the other hand, response as to whether the SOLs have made their job more difficult was evenly divided. This is evidenced by an even distribution among the responses; 50% indicated that SOLs have made their job more difficult, and 50% indicated that SOLs have not made their job more difficult.

What is the relationship, if any, between No Child Left Behind and the tenure of superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

This study determined that 71% of superintendents responding believe that NCLB has not had a positive impact on education in Virginia. However, NCLB does not factor into superintendents' decisions to leave the profession or retire. This is evidenced by superintendents' responses to survey items that ask whether NCLB has caused them to consider leaving the profession or retiring earlier than they originally planned. The data revealed that 80%

have not considered leaving the profession as a result of NCLB, and 76% indicated that NCLB has not influenced their retirement decision. This supports the findings of a national study conducted by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) which indicates that superintendents are satisfied with their career choice.

When disaggregated by age, 70% of superintendents age 41-50 and 82% of superintendents age 51 or older indicated that NCLB has not caused them to consider leaving the education profession or retiring earlier than originally planned. The responses are consistent in other demographical areas such as gender. For example, male respondents (77%) and female respondents (84%) revealed that NCLB has not caused them to consider leaving the education profession. As evidence by data disaggregated by years of experience, at least 65% of superintendents at each level of experience (i.e. 0-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25, 30+) revealed that they have not considered leaving the profession or retiring early.

What is the relationship, if any, between Other Influences and the tenure of superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

As a result of this study, Other Influences regarding superintendent tenure were revealed. The study revealed that local politics do not play a role in superintendent tenure. As evidenced by the data, 65% of superintendents indicated that the demands of local politics would not cause them to leave their school division. When disaggregated by race, however, the Asian respondent (100%) noted that the demands of local politics have caused him to consider leaving the school district. Data disaggregated by superintendent experience within the district revealed that 70% of respondents with six to twenty years of experience have not considered leaving the school district as result of local politics.

Funding, or a lack thereof, does not factor into superintendent tenure. The study indicates that superintendents are not deterred or have not considered leaving their school district due to a lack of funding provided by local governing bodies as evidenced by 86% of respondents. Data disaggregated by gender revealed that 86% of males and 84% of females have not considered leaving their school district due to lack of local funding.

Evening responsibilities which affect family time do not affect superintendent tenure. This is evidenced in the study by superintendent responses which divulged that over 72% of superintendents would not consider leaving the profession as result of evening activities.

Pressure by the community to meet accreditation standards is also not a factor in superintendent tenure. This is evidenced by the fact that over 93% of the respondents indicated that this variable would not cause them to consider leaving the superintendency.

Interaction with School Board is a factor that affects superintendent tenure. In the study, superintendents indicated that interactions with the School Board could have an adverse affect on their tenure with the district as indicated by 96% of respondents. When disaggregated demographically the data revealed that 100% of respondents age 41-50 and 95% of respondents age 51 or older indicated that interactions with the School Board would affect their decision to stay with the school district. In addition, 97% of male respondents and 92% of female respondents noted that their decision to stay with the school district would be affected by interactions with the School Board. The responses were consistent across other demographic variables that School Board interaction would affect superintendents' decision to stay with the school district. This is supported by Glass' (2000) study which found that board micromanagement inhibits superintendent effectiveness. In addition, Natkin, Cooper, Alborano,

Padilla, and Ghosh (2002) found that the involvement of School Board members is a major irritant for superintendents and is cited as a reason for shorter tenure.

Implications

If school divisions are going to retain superintendents, it is important that consideration be given to the impact of SOLs in relation to the role of the superintendent as the instructional leader for the division, and the negative perception of NCLB held by superintendents in Virginia. In addition, School Board interactions with superintendents and the impact that they could have on superintendent tenure must be addressed.

The following are implications determined from this study:

1. The advent of SOLs has not had a negative impact on superintendent tenure. It is recommended that superintendents continue to ensure that the curriculum is organized to support the goals of the SOLs.
2. Superintendents in Virginia indicated that NCLB has not had a positive impact on education. It is recommended that superintendents work with legislators through their professional association (Virginia Association of School Superintendents) to bring about needed changes in the NCLB laws in order to make the legislation useful.
3. Superintendents indicated that interactions with the School Board will affect their tenure. It is recommended that superintendents and School Board members be required to participate in training that focuses on the distinct role of each as it relates to the role of School Board members and the role of the superintendent.

Recommendations for Future Study

Superintendents are confronted with serving in many roles in a school division: financial planner, manager, politician, child advocate, instructional leader, community liaison, human

resources officer, and many other roles. This study has determined that the increased accountability levied by the requirements of the SOLs, NCLB, and most of the Other Influences items has not affected superintendent tenure in the Commonwealth of Virginia. However, researchers interested in pursuing the affects of SOLs, NCLB, and Other Influences on the tenure of other educators may consider the following areas for future study:

1. Replicate this study in three to five years to determine if superintendent responses parallel this study. This will provide trend data and will give superintendents more time to determine the affect of SOLs, NCLB and Other Influences on education.
2. Duplicate this study on a national level as it relates to NCLB and the impact on superintendent tenure. The findings serve as a catalyst for superintendents to articulate needed changes on a national level.
3. Conduct a study to determine the impact of the SOLs, NCLB and Other Influences on the tenure of principals in Virginia. This will allow superintendents to determine the impact of SOLs, NCLB and Other Influences at the school level.
4. Conduct a study to determine the impact of the SOLs, NCLB and Other Influences on the tenure of teachers who teach grades 3, 5, 8 and end-of-course SOL classes. This will allow superintendents to determine the impact of SOLs, NCLB and Other Influences at the classroom teacher level.
5. Conduct a study to determine specific School Board behaviors that may affect on superintendent tenure. This will provide School Board members data on the impact they have superintendent tenure.
6. Conduct a national study to determine the affect of NCLB and increased accountability on the superintendent applicant pool. Because of the limited number of superintendent

search organization in Virginia; thus, yielding a limitation in this study, this has to be a national study. This will assist in determining whether NCLB has an impact on the number of superintendent applicants, and who applies for the superintendency.

7. Conduct a study to compile a specific list of other influences that affect superintendent tenure. This will assist in identifying specific factors that affect the tenure of superintendents.

Limitations

During the process of this study, the researcher anticipated that superintendent search organizations would yield sufficient data that could be used to determine if SOLs and NCLB were having an affect on the superintendent applicant pool. Because of the limited number of organizations and the low rate of superintendent turnover in Virginia, there was not enough data available to generalize this information. The researcher learned that some search organizations are not willing to participate in studies unless the study is directly linked to an area of specific interest to the organization. Also, the researcher learned that superintendent search organizations actively recruit applicants along with their open application process. Recruitment of applicants versus applicants applying on their own would potentially skew the applicant pool data.

The researcher utilized survey maker software to develop the survey for this study in anticipation that the data could be exported and imported directly into SPSS in order to minimize any human error in data entry. The researcher realized that the survey maker software file was not compatible to SPSS, therefore, the researcher was required to manually enter the data into SPSS in order to run statistical analyses.

Although surveys were sent to superintendents early in December, the researcher discovered that this conflicted with the time superintendents were beginning their initial budget

planning. This resulted in having to make follow-up calls to superintendents who had not returned their surveys before the end of January which is considered an intense budget preparation time for superintendents. This required time to make the follow-up calls in a timely manner while the survey was still fresh on the minds of the superintendents.

Reflections

My interest in conducting this study was generated as a result of working closely with two superintendents and witnessing the many challenges associated with their job. Not only are superintendents confronted with the day-to-day challenges of providing oversight and leadership in a school division, but they have the responsibility of ensuring that the school division successfully meets the accreditation standards as measured largely by the Standards of Learning, and the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act as measured by Adequate Yearly Progress.

With the added pressures of SOLs and NCLB, I expected that the results of this study would reveal that these pressures were negatively affecting superintendent tenure. What the research data produced was that the increased accountability associated with SOLs and NCLB are not factors that negatively affect the superintendent tenure. However, the data revealed that superintendent interactions with the School Board is a contributing factor that would affect a superintendent's tenure. The data yielded in this study supports Glass, et al. (2000) who concluded that, while problems and challenges exist in the superintendency, the position "continues to be a very functional position in public education" (p.4); superintendents are happy with their career choices, and they would not hesitate to recommend the superintendency to others.