

Superintendent Instructional Leadership: Selected  
Leadership Behaviors and Their Relationship to an  
Instructional Intervention

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# Superintendent Instructional Leadership

## Introduction

The responsibilities of the modern public school superintendent are remarkably varied. They must be effective managers of money, personnel, buildings, schedules, and logistics. In many, especially smaller, districts the school is the largest employer, restaurant, transportation service, consumer of utilities, social service provider, real estate owner, event host, benefits administrator, taxing entity, governmental agency, and promulgator of public policy. Despite the broad nature of those characteristics, none of them are the core technology for which a school exists, namely teaching and learning. Superintendents of these smaller districts must effectively supervise all of these operations while fulfilling their legal and ethical responsibilities to ensure students receive the best learning experiences that can be provided.

An interesting metaphor for this multiplicity of abilities can be found in popular television programming. Viewers currently enjoy a variety of programs in which amateurs compete for professional entrée based on some kind of talent. One such program requires dancers to perform in a different, prescribed style each week. Some contestants perform across all styles well. Others are truly challenged to make the changes. Interestingly, rarely does a performer self-report that they are not able to dance a certain way or that they are substituting some similar style for the one required. The parallel to instructional leadership is clear. Leaders are aware of a required vocabulary of leadership skills. Rarely do leaders reject the use of a particular skill. However, the performance of a particular behavior can vary greatly, sometimes looking like something else altogether. As the reader will find, the use of collaboration provides a rich example.

The phrase “legal and ethical obligations” is not hyperbolic language. Petersen and Young (2004) as well as Grogan and Andrews (2006) indicated that superintendents have never

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experienced more pressure to produce increasing student achievement. Indeed, the federal government, through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), has set numerical targets for student outcomes. Some argue that these achievement targets cannot be attained because the government has issued irreconcilably contradictory mandates through NCLB and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to Peterson and Young, NCLB brought a level of sanction for non-achievement that has existed before.

While severe sanction for non-achievement is relatively new, the superintendent as an instructional leader is not. The office of superintendent of schools was created primarily to ensure that schools provided coordinated and effective instructional programs. Essentially, early superintendents were instructional leaders. Internal and external influences have added responsibilities to the role. Superintendents have been, and to some extent continue to be, scientific managers, social engineers, and political leaders. These layers of role expectation, added over the past 150 years, have called into question the belief that superintendents can make a difference in student learning (Brunner, Grogan, & Bork, 2002; Callahan, 1962, 1966; Cuban, 1974, 1976; Kowalski, 1999, 2005). Glass (2006) indicated that management duties, especially in schools with enrollments of 2,500 or fewer students concentrate so heavily in the superintendency that management of a school system was incompatible with instructional leadership. Bredeson (1996) and Bredeson and Kose (2007) found that superintendents are overwhelmed by the job and often attend to short-term, job threatening domains such as financial management to the exclusion of those actions the superintendents know will improve learning. Marzano and Waters (2006, 2009) established that superintendents can, in fact, be effective instructional leaders. In meta-analytical studies, Marzano and Waters found a set of

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superintendent behaviors that were positively and significantly associated with student achievement. Those behaviors were as follows.

1. Effective superintendents engage in collaborative goal setting.
2. Effective superintendents made collaboratively set goals non-negotiable in the areas of student achievement and instruction.
3. Effective superintendents aligned boards of education with district goals.
4. Effective superintendents monitored progress on student achievement and instructional goals.
5. Effective superintendents provided resources to support goals in student achievement and instruction.
6. Effective superintendents provide an appropriate level of autonomy for building administration.

Because superintendents are experiencing unprecedented pressure to produce every improved student achievement while continuing to shoulder responsibilities for a myriad of management duties, the importance of effective instructional leadership cannot be underestimated. Effective – and time efficient - superintendent instructional leadership is even more important in smaller schools. With this in mind, this research probed the differences in superintendent instructional leadership behaviors in smaller schools in Missouri.

### The Study

This research probed the relationship between five selected superintendent instructional leadership behaviors from Marzano and Waters (2006) (“alignment of board to goals” was excluded) and an instructional improvement intervention. The Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI) was developed by Valentine and Painter (1998) and subsequently refined by Valentine

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(Valentine, 2007). The IPI is a research-based instructional intervention that embeds the reflective study of instructional practices and student engagement in a collaborative model of continuous school improvement. Yair (2000), and later Collins (2009), established a strong link between student engagement and student achievement. By extension, a link between the behaviors identified by Marzano and Waters and IPI, implemented with high fidelity to its protocol is quite logical.

Superintendents of smaller Missouri schools were selected for survey regarding their self-perceptions of the Marzano and Waters behaviors and the degree to which they were implementing the IPI in accordance with its prescribed protocol. Ultimately 43 superintendents participated in the survey. Schools were classified as High, Moderate, or Low with respect to the fidelity of IPI implementation (HFI, MFI, LFI). One group of respondents provided problematic data. This group (LFI) indicated that they were not regularly engaging the IPI data collection process but provided other answers that appeared to be related to some previous time when they were using the IPI faithfully. This data proved too problematic for statistical analyses and was excluded from the quantitative portion of the study. Following quantitative analyses, a random stratified sample of superintendents were selected for follow-up interviews. Twelve superintendents (four each from HFI, MFI, and LFI) participated in the interviews. Qualitative analyses of the interview data provided a rich picture of the differences in how superintendents lead.

### Findings

Quantitative analyses failed to find significant differences in superintendent instructional leadership behaviors among the two remaining groups, HFI and MFI. However, further quantitative analyses provided interesting findings and patterns. First, the Marzano and Waters

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behaviors were positively and significantly correlated to rates of free and reduced lunch (F/RL). Second, while not statistically significant, the presence or absence of an assistant superintendent appeared to affect superintendents' self-perceptions regarding instructional leadership behaviors.

Qualitative analyses of data surfaced three major themes; Collaborations, Ambiguity of Mandated Goals, and Conceptions of Leadership. Within and across these themes, clear differences in how superintendents lead emerged.

### Nature of Collaborations

Superintendents across Fidelity of Implementation categories reported that the IPI process had positive outcomes. At a minimum, faculties developed common vocabularies, improved understanding of effective teaching practice, and developed or enhanced problem solving abilities. Furthermore, teachers became accustomed to outside observation during the data gather process. Deprivatization allowed faculties to engage in collaborative dialogue; the dialogue often resulting in enhanced instructional practice through peer coaching. The teacher learning, exemplified by improvements in teaching behavior, was found primarily in High Fidelity of Implementation schools. Moderate Fidelity Implementing schools were not, however, without teacher learning. Teachers in these schools were characterized as having a greater awareness of good teaching as well as of productive use of time as a result of the IPI process. The simple and straightforward finding that regular collegial conversations focused on effective teaching has powerful implications for schools. If student learning is truly important, this simple and inexpensive effort must be adopted.

Senge's (1990) discussion of learning organizations supports these findings. Second-order change is fostered through ongoing collaborative dialogue that embeds changes in teaching in the culture of the school. This research concludes that the implementation of IPI fosters

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second-order change with regard to instructional practices. Further, greater adherence to the IPI protocol – greater fidelity of implementation – increases second-order change. Marzano and Waters (2009) advocated a multi-tiered action plan for improving instruction, much of which reinforced the findings of this study. Their research indicated that the development of a common language and model for instruction should initially be developed. Following the establishment of that common ground, Marzano and Waters indicated that schools should foster peer coaching, modeling of effective instruction, and systematic teacher interaction about instruction. Clearly, the IPI protocol is closely aligned, if not perfectly parallel, to the instructional improvement recommendations made by Marzano and Waters.

At the level of district leadership, the nature of collaboration was different for High Fidelity Implementers than the other two groups. While all superintendents consistently reported that they used collaborative processes, High Fidelity Implementers characterized other stakeholders in terms that showed more respect and value. Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers certainly included others in the processes. They gathered input from these stakeholders. However, collaboration for these superintendents included a “Buck Stops Here” decision making authority. Stakeholders, including school board and community members, were referred to as “these people.” Collaborative sessions were spoken of as “meetings” or “work sessions” rather than “strategic planning” as High Fidelity Implementers did.

High Fidelity Implementer superintendents gave evidence that they bore a burden of responsibility. It was important to them to be well prepared as they entered collaboration meetings, analyzing data so that others’ time would be used effectively and so useful outcomes would be reached. Not only were they well prepared for planning and goal setting, they assumed greater responsibility for outcomes, consistently rating themselves more influential than

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subordinates when considering implementing change. High Fidelity Implementing superintendents lived with a firm understanding of the interdependence between them and their stakeholders. Superintendents must have the support of others to develop goals and plans. Superintendents also understand that they are uniquely positioned to empower others to act – to execute agreed upon plans – if superintendents purposefully prepare to do so.

In contrast, Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers did not report any special preparation for meetings and rated subordinate leaders as both more capable and more influential than themselves. The greatest example of lack of preparation for meetings came from the Low Fidelity Implementer category. “I don’t have to tell them the plan, I just have to make sure we have one so I make them [principals] come to our meetings and tell me what their plan is.”

Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementer superintendents were generally willing to grant comparatively less freedom for others in decision making than were High Fidelity Implementers. Low Fidelity Implementers tended to limit the area of professional latitude to instructional methods and materials. Moderate Fidelity implementers added some freedom in the delivery, although not content, of professional development to the list. High Fidelity Implementers were firm in their belief that once they were sure everyone clearly understood the goal and a limited number of parameters such as financial constraints, they would grant broad freedom for others to make decisions and implement plans. Among the important areas superintendents believed were critical to control, was the content of professional development. Superintendents knew that this aspect of schools could lead either toward or away from the vision and could either create intellectual stimulation or disengagement for teachers.

In essence, the picture of the superintendent of a High Fidelity of Implementation district was one who communicated respect for other stakeholders and understood that the

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superintendent must be well prepared to lead. Those superintendents bore a burden of responsibility for success but had confidence in other professionals to make decisions and develop and implement plans. Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers were less willing to share power, less respectful of others, and felt less responsible for outcomes.

### Ambiguity of Mandated Goals

Externally imposed requirements in the form of state and federally mandated student outcomes were perceived negatively by all superintendents. Mildly derisive labels were used when referring to the measures embedded in the state's Annual Performance Report and those found as a part of NCLB's Adequate Yearly Progress. Some superintendents indicated that they did not believe those goals to be the best measures of student learning. Those unwelcome goals, however, were uniformly reported as the bases for the development of each district's CSIP. Interestingly, once embedded in the CSIP, superintendents indicated that building level plans were articulated to support the goals. Only one school reported that goals were developed at the building level and then aggregated to the district. Superintendents expressed no irony that they resented imposed goals but were essentially imposing goals on buildings. Since collaboration was a common thread in goal development, superintendents may have perceived that the collaborative context mitigated the negatively charged imposition. Interestingly, when superintendents mentioned attaining the externally imposed goals, they expressed pride rather than marginalizing the accomplishment.

Clearly, superintendents of High Fidelity Implementing districts had a plan for the development of goals. They were quite focused about the direction for their district, spending significant effort preparing to lead others to the same vision. While operating collaboratively and respectfully, they insisted on intentionally articulated support from the building level.

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Superintendents from the other groups were simply less purposeful and sharply focused. The degree to which they provided a clear sense of direction and prepared to lead seemed to vary directly with the Fidelity of Implementation category.

### Conceptions of Leadership

Perhaps the most intriguing findings emerged from data about leadership. The findings developed in two general areas, power and influence and leadership skills. Interestingly, superintendents responded easily to questions about the leadership of others and to probes about the actions by which superintendents themselves led. However, when asked about their own skills or about their assessments of power and influence, many superintendents found it difficult to answer directly.

As stated earlier, superintendents of High Fidelity of Implementation districts felt a burden of responsibility for outcomes but were the group most inclined to respect others and share power. Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers were inclined to listen to others but were more likely to retain decision making responsibility. Low Fidelity Implementers not only retained that authority but had a narrower range of options wherein they trusted others to make choices. Also as reported earlier, High Fidelity Implementers responded to questions about relative influence with a greater weight placed in the office of superintendent than did Moderate or Low Fidelity Implementers. Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers emphasized that principals and lead teachers held more influence than was reported in the High Fidelity Implementation group. In the Low Fidelity group, half of the interviewees ultimately did not assign weights to the influence held by various stakeholders in the process of implementing change. While the rest of the superintendents did answer the questions identifying the

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stakeholder groups and did assign values to the groups' relative influence they also appeared to struggle with considering the context of their school system in those terms.

When examined in combination these two findings paint a picture of superintendents who may not readily perceive the dynamics of power and influence in their districts. Alternatively, the findings may be explained by the conclusion that superintendents do perceive those dynamics but hold the knowledge at a tacit level and struggle to translate it to an explicit level (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Nonaka and Takeuchi indicated that experts, such as bakers, may understand much about making dough but cannot tell others about it.

When superintendents were asked to describe the processes by which they accomplished particular leadership tasks, they were able to articulate their answers much more easily. Superintendents knew what they were doing, what was effective, and what might need improvement. However, when asked to describe the situation in more abstract and general terms, superintendents were less conversant. One reasonable conclusion is that superintendents were challenged to articulate conceptions of their own leadership because they operated not in a calculated, strategic manner but rather were inclined toward intuitive actions based on what they felt or knew at a subconscious level. This method of operation may be, but not necessarily is, due to the sense of being overwhelmed as found in Bredeson and Kose (2007).

Another possible explanation about the challenge superintendents experienced in describing power and influence can be developed by examining case-specific data from the question about the relative power of educators identified as key to successful change implementation. While superintendents generally reported greater superintendent influence associated with higher Fidelity of Implementation group, this was not absolutely uniform. Each Fidelity of Implementation category contained at least one superintendent who reported

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substantively equalized influence across all, or at least the majority, of identified parties. While the reports may, in fact, be relatively accurate, it is also possible that the culture of the superintendency finds that talking explicitly about differences in power is repugnant. When superintendents report an equality of influence they may be subconsciously promoting a value of egalitarianism. This explanation would be consistent with the finding that all superintendents in this study reported using collaborative processes while simultaneously reporting that they impose specific goals. Bolman and Deal (1997) suggested that “leadership as theater” is at least as important as the instrumental actions of a leader. In the case of superintendents reporting equalized power and influence, we find that instrumental leadership is certainly at play in the mandate but the leader may also be “acting” less influential to lubricate the friction created by necessary but unwelcome mandates actions. In essence, when mandates are declared by leadership, figurative, idealized language is used to mitigate the negative emotional impact of the non-collaborative action. However, superintendents did not evince insincerity in their responses about equalized influence. If superintendents felt overwhelmed, as found in Bredeson and Kose (2007), they may have simply but clumsily been expressing their gratitude for and belief in the importance of the work of others in their schools. Simply put, they may truly believe that they are surrounded by people who make sure that the schools provide the best education possible.

Superintendents were not necessarily only paying lip service to the importance of others. Across all Fidelity of Implementation categories, superintendents reported that they relied heavily on principals, and when present assistant superintendents, to monitor progress toward goals in the areas of instruction and achievement. Reliance on those leaders came in both formal reporting to the superintendent and board of education and in informal conversations. Interestingly, only the High Fidelity Implementers combined this reliance with specific personal

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data collection designed to triangulate the principals' opinions. Marzano and Waters (2009) indicated that district leadership should have evidence to establish progress on instructional improvement. The researchers suggested that building level leadership could supply that evidence in the form of notes of observations or summaries of meetings.

One Low Fidelity Implementer, who exhibited certain aspects of Moderate Fidelity Implementation, reported that it was important for her to make personal observations. However, she did not characterize the process as important for the purposes of triangulation but rather to listen to stakeholders and communicate her value for instructional improvement. Her actions align to effective leadership behavior advocated by Willower and Licata (1997) who indicated that values are communicated by examining that to which leaders pay attention. Therefore, one important tool for leaders is the use of physical presence.

While High Fidelity Implementer superintendents were clearly more inclined to share power than Moderate or Low Fidelity Implementers, it is equally clear that High Fidelity Implementers were not different in asserting their authority over financial resources. The data indicated that when finances were discussed in any of the interview conversations, superintendents were different in their collaborative approach but all retained, either by factors inherent to the decision making processes or by fiat, the power to ensure fiscal stability. The literature indicates that superintendents are sensitive to, if not significantly distracted by, the fact that unsound fiscal management is job threatening (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Glass, 2006; Morgan, 2000).

In addition to being asked about the power and influence within their districts, superintendents were asked to describe the leadership skills they possessed that supported their success in implementing change. Superintendents struggled to articulate a concise answer to this

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question. Despite multiple attempts to redirect their thinking, superintendents consistently described personal *qualities* rather than *skills*. The personal qualities were relevant and likely did support successful leadership. However, superintendents did not easily explicate those skills they possessed and employed to lead.

The single most prevalent answer given by superintendents was that they must be trustworthy. They also indicated that openness and honesty were important to their success. Although not as consistently reported, all Fidelity of Implementation categories provided some data regarding a team orientation and the inclination to collaborate. Some High Fidelity Implementers indicated that flexibility and patience, held in combination with perseverance, were necessary. One Low Fidelity Implementer indicated that being “low key” was helpful. Reflection on these answers clearly indicates that superintendents are sensitive to the relational nature of their position.

In addition to personal qualities, superintendents cited some sets of knowledge as important to success. Across all Fidelity of Implementation categories, superintendents reported that expertise in instruction was important to their success. Additionally, some mention was made in each category of the need to be knowledgeable about personnel management.

Interestingly, superintendents in the Moderate and Low Fidelity of Implementation groups cited one skill, communication. While important to leadership, the ability to communicate is hardly the exclusive purview of the leadership arena. High Fidelity Implementers provided no evidence that they considered communication skills to be important in answer to this question. This finding is supported most clearly by the evidence from Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers. These groups cited information or “the message” as factors they must control to successfully implement change.

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Having painted the picture that superintendents do not easily report the leadership skills they employ when asked directly, it is important to examine data from other areas of questioning. Superintendents, especially in the High Fidelity of Implementation group, indicated that they engaged in developing a shared vision for change. The vision was not an ambiguous, idealistic one but rather a vision based on clear outcomes and boundaries developed as part of the goal setting process. High Fidelity Implementers indicated that once others were clear on the ultimate outcomes and the non-negotiables, superintendents were willing to grant broad latitude for others to accomplish the goals. One High Fidelity Implementing superintendent indicated that his school had benefitted from a change in philosophy. Where the school had formerly considered “raising the bar” a standard that applied to students, this superintendent had moved the object of the high expectations to the teaching staff.

When discussing professional development for staff, superintendents indicated that some level of control was important. High and some Moderate Fidelity Implementers wanted to control the content of professional development. Some did this directly; others indicated that the content was dictated by the goals set in the district. Superintendents who did not indicate a desire to control the content did discuss the importance of it, even in the context of granting some latitude to others in determining delivery mechanisms. Superintendents, therefore, were found to place some importance of providing intellectual stimulation to their staffs. Two superintendents, one High and one Low Fidelity Implementer, indicated that it was important to personally attend the professional development, arguably indicating a value on modeling desired behavior.

The findings regarding superintendents’ conceptions about power, influence, and leadership skills provide a fertile ground for contrasting the applicability of two dissimilar models of leadership. Ogawa and Bossert (1995) described leadership not as something vested in

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particular office or individual but as a quality that exists in the relationships between and among organizational members. When superintendents were asked to describe their leadership skills, they replied with a list of personal qualities and a relatively small body of knowledge. The single skill explicitly reported was communications. The personal qualities superintendents reported were qualities that support positive interpersonal relationships. Communications skills provide a carrier medium for knowledge exchange along the conduit of the relationships. Indeed, this is congruent with the position taken by Ogawa and Bossert when they stated that actors within an organization draw on expertise, craft-relevant knowledge, and use that knowledge to influence the organization. Ogawa and Bossert further stated that “Leadership is relational. . . .occurs through interaction . . . and influence cannot be assumed to be unidirectional.” This model of leadership provides a cogent lens through which to view superintendents’ perspective on leadership skills and loci of influence in the organization.

Transformational leadership theory, as expressed by Leithwood and Jantzi (1990), also provides a useful model by which the study’s findings can be considered. As stated earlier, superintendents did not respond clearly to direct questioning about their leadership skills. However, data from other questions produced findings that superintendents were in fact engaging in research-based leadership. Superintendents provided evidence that they engaged in modeling behavior they intended to promote (idealized influence) by attending professional development sessions. The consistent surfacing of professional development in superintendent remarks indicated that providing intellectual stimulation was a part of their operations. High Fidelity Implementers were most specific about controlling what stimulation was provided. Superintendents expressed that they held high expectations for teaching staff, with High Fidelity Implementers articulating specific intentions to find teachers moving from awareness to

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application with regard to their knowledge of instructional improvement. Little evidence of individual support surfaced in the data. The lack of evidence of individual support does not necessarily mean that staff did not receive it, but only that superintendents did not reveal it in their interviews. Finally, High Fidelity Implementers distinguished themselves in being most clear about the need to solidify a unitary vision in the minds of others. These superintendents did so by indicating that the presence of a common vision allowed them to grant freedom in which others could plan and operate.

Clearly, High Fidelity Implementing superintendents did not speak directly to perceptions about their own leadership skills. Further, their direct answers about power and influence were ambiguous. However, when indirect evidence was examined, superintendents led by using both the relational leadership described by Ogawa and Bossert (1995) and some aspects of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Superintendents valued those personal qualities that strengthened relationships. They engaged in developing a shared vision, providing intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and communicated high expectations for staff.

### Conclusions

Quantitative analyses failed to determine significant differences in superintendents' leadership behavior. However, superintendents provided clear evidence that increases in poverty foster increases in academic pressure which, in turn, increases superintendent emphasis on collaborative goal setting, the non-negotiability of goals, providing resources for goal attainment, and monitoring progress toward goals. Further, in schools with assistant superintendents, lead superintendents are less likely to hold their own instructional leadership in high regard.

The Instructional Practices Inventory produced second-order change as a product of implementation. The second-order change took the form of teacher learning through common

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vocabulary development and peer coaching. Increased problem solving by teachers was also found. Teachers in High Fidelity Implementing districts improved student engagement through improved teaching. Moderate Fidelity Implementing faculties provided evidence that they better understood good teaching and were more aware of their use of instructional time. These positive outcomes provide increasing benefits with greater adherence to the IPI protocols.

Superintendents in all categories of Fidelity of Implementation provided a rich body of data from which the themes of Nature of Collaboration, Ambiguity of Mandated Goals, and Leadership Conceptions emerged. Superintendents held significant commonalities across these themes. However, differences emerged, especially between superintendents from High Fidelity Implementing districts and those in the Moderate and Low Fidelity of Implementation groups. Some of the differences were clear differences of content while others were a matter of degree. In many cases superintendents produced enigmatic results as they failed to easily articulate the nature of their leadership but could clearly describe how they operated in order to implement change.

Clearly, High Fidelity Implementer superintendents were distinguished by their approach to collaboration, embracing a responsibility for outcomes and a respect for others that drove them to be well prepared to lead others to a preferred outcome, a concrete vision for student achievement. While these superintendents did not welcome externally imposed goals, they were unapologetic about the non-negotiability of those goals and the need for others to support the goals. When High Fidelity Implementing superintendents were satisfied that sufficient support and clarity existed and that other stakeholders understood what else was non-negotiable, the superintendents trusted others to plan and act, another manifestation of their respect for others. Superintendents from the other two Fidelity of Implementation groups narrowed the areas in

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which others had freedom of choice. Collaboration provided the sphere within which the tension between control and granting freedom – defined autonomy – played out in the course of goal setting and goal attainment.

Superintendents in the study all reported relying on subordinates, principals and assistant superintendents, to monitor progress toward goals. High Fidelity Implementers distinguished themselves in that they did not do so blindly. Whether by periodically monitoring data or observing teaching first-hand, High Fidelity Implementers provided a means of triangulation for objectivity and accountability.

When superintendents were asked about providing resources, most superintendents first considered money. All superintendents controlled the financial health of the district. Moderate and Low Fidelity Implementers tended to speak frankly about budget decisions being theirs alone. High Fidelity Implementer superintendents, however, tended to control finances less directly, making sure that budget building and spending were tied to goals. High Fidelity Implementer superintendents tended to have a more complex view of resources, including the strategic use of personnel decision making as a means of maximizing the cost: benefit ratio.

The most intriguing findings of the study involved the differences between how superintendents described their leadership skills and the dynamics of power and influence in their district versus how they operated in these areas. Superintendents were clearly challenged to directly discuss their leadership skills and their analyses of power and influence in their districts. However, superintendents could easily discuss the actions they take to accomplish change. High Fidelity Implementing superintendents provided much evidence that they employed research-based leadership without labeling it as such.

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### Recommendations

The study of superintendents as instructional leaders is challenging because superintendent influence is mitigated by district size. Superintendents not only face challenges of multiple role expectations, but also find themselves removed from the instruction for which they are ultimately responsible by at least one more level of hierarchy than any other member of the school. Nonetheless, ongoing research should be conducted on superintendent instructional leadership while considering district enrollment as a controlling variable. Regardless of school size, superintendents have multiple responsibilities and yet are primarily responsible for student learning.

As mentioned under Limitations, further research built on this exploratory study is recommended. First, a similar study on a larger population sample might produce statistically significant differences. Second, research that triangulated self-reports on instructional leadership with data gathered from principals and teachers would provide a more comprehensive measure of superintendent instructional leadership. Third, because the findings of Marzano and Waters (2006, 2009) and Leithwood, Aitken, and Jantzi (2006) is closely related to Leithwood's (1990) model of transformational leadership, an exploration of a possible relationship between transformational leadership and High Fidelity IPI implementation should be conducted.

The findings related to teacher collaboration provoke questions about the long-term effects of IPI implementation on teacher culture. Clearly, instructional effectiveness is improved through the collegial conversations embedded in the IPI process. Since the process emphasizes teacher-led data collection, analysis, and problem-solving it is logical to consider that the process might lead to greater teacher empowerment and subsequently to other teacher leadership and school improvement outcomes over time. Research in this area should be conducted as the number of schools with long-term implementation of the IPI process evolves.

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The articulation between theoretical models of leadership and daily practice was not readily apparent in the responses from the superintendents of this study. Superintendent preparation programs should consider a more purposeful approach to connect these two aspects for aspiring superintendents. Clearly, the ability to step back from the daily perspective and reflect on how theory might inform practice would serve superintendents, and more importantly their students, well. Research into the area of superintendents' purposeful use of theory to inform their practice is recommended.

To the extent that preparation programs can effect an improvement in aspiring superintendents' ability to articulate a clear vision and then to trust others to implement it should be a priority. In no other area were High Fidelity of Implementation superintendents so clearly different than their peers.

Finally, superintendents should purposefully engage peers – especially high performing superintendents – in professional conversations about teaching, learning, and leading. An interesting aspect of the qualitative interviews, especially with Moderate and Low Fidelity of Implementation superintendents was to hear them process what they were actually doing with their time as they reflected on the leadership questions they were being asked. More than once a superintendent remarked about being sidetracked or distracted from implementing a change they felt was important. Since the questioning was non-judgmental, this dissonance between “what I know I should do” and “what I actually do” was not due to some externally imposed accountability measure but rather simply a surfacing of what the superintendent had already perceived and was now articulating.

Superintendents in this study provided much data in which to examine instructional leadership behaviors and the process of instructional improvement. The differences, while not

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statistically significant, nonetheless provide an intriguing tapestry of leadership. Interestingly, the differences noted in the qualitative analyses were easily discernable when superintendents talked about what they did but much less so when they talked about themselves as leaders. While analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data indicated that some superintendents were able to lead instructional improvement with admirable facility, others were less adept. Indeed, High Fidelity Implementers were like accomplished dancers. They act with fluidity, grace, and skill that observers can and do discuss at length but who find themselves somewhat clumsy when asked to explain their own talent.

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