

**THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT IN IMPROVING STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT**

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by

Melinda J. Boone

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**THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT IN IMPROVING
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

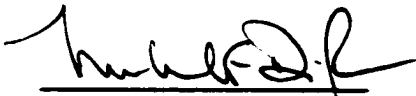
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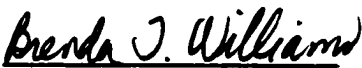
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Brenda T. Williams, Ed. D.

This work is dedicated to the late

James F. and Marie J. Peele

- the wind beneath my wings -

“To God be the glory for the things He hath done.”

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THE ROLE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT IN IMPROVING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the instructional leadership behaviors of the superintendent during an era of educational reform in Virginia. Specifically, the study sought to determine what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to improvement in student achievement on the Standards of Learning assessment. Superintendent instructional behaviors were explored in relation to the five points of the conceptual framework drawn from the literature and professional standards of the superintendency - 1) The leadership style for the superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents; 2) Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents; 3) Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement; 4) Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement; and 5) All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational. The data collected was accomplished using semi-structured interviews of eight selected superintendents and principals of school divisions of no more than 5000 students. Principals also completed the Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey (SILS). Results were presented in narrative form and analyzed for common themes and language congruent with the conceptual framework. The themes and language were compared with the areas of the conceptual framework looking for similarities and differences. The instructional behaviors of participating superintendents in this study could be used in practice by superintendents seeking to

respond to student achievement reform initiatives as well as in training programs for superintendents.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Statement of Problem

Since the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, A Nation at Risk, public schools have been working feverishly to improve educational opportunities for this nation's youth (Bjork, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Deal, 1992; Gross, 1985; Wallace, 1992). Many aspects of the educational process have been addressed including academic standards, length of school day and year, and accountability. In general, the focus has been on raising the rigor of American education (Gross, 1985).

Fullan (1991) states "One of the most fundamental problems in education today is that people do not have a clear, coherent sense of meaning about what educational change is for, what it is, and how it proceeds." Goodlad (1984) stated "Significant educational improvement of schooling, not mere tinkering, requires that we focus on entire schools, not just teachers or principals or curricula or organization or school-community relations but all of these and more." Most reform activities have focused on the individual school as a unit of decision-making, increasing opportunities for participatory involvement by students and staff.

Reports since A Nation at Risk (1983) including the Carnegie Task Force Report (1986), California's Commission on the Teaching Profession (1985), Holmes Group Teacher Education Reforms (1986) and the Governor's Commission (1986) have focused almost exclusively on school site reform (Bjork, 1993; Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). Noticeably absent from these discussions and other educational reform initiatives is the role of the superintendent in reform. Yet, superintendents remain the appointed instructional leaders of school divisions.

"Whatever significant changes are made in school organizations and schooling, they surely will involve the position of the superintendent" (Glass, 1992). These key "leadership positions so important to the future of the nation will be at the center of the movement toward

creating more effective schools” (Glass, 1992). The *1992 AASA Study of the American School Superintendency: America’s Education Leaders in a Time of Reform* reveals the many challenges and roles for the superintendent during a time of institutional change. This report indicates that over fifty-percent of school superintendents plan to retire during the 1990s. As a result, a great deal of experience will be lost.

At a time when communities are looking for and demanding increased accountability in public education for their tax dollars, school boards are looking for superintendents who are not just managers, but also strong instructional leaders (DiPaola & Stronge, 2000; Glass, 1992). “Younger superintendents are leading many changes, especially in the areas of emphasizing instruction, academic preparation and meaningful community involvement in district activities. Superintendents’ responses indicate that many aspects of the profession must change if schools are to meet the challenges of the 21st century” (Glass, 1992).

Baldrige and Deal (1975), Norton, et al.(1996) and Carter and Cunningham (1997) assert that faculty, students, administrators and the general public are concerned with the educational institution’s ability to change in light of new demands placed upon it. In order to meet these demands educational administrators must be able to stimulate and manage change within the educational organization.

The need for collaborative relationships between superintendents and their constituents is necessary to bring about change and improvement in education (Johnson, 1996a). Johnson’s (1996a) study of the superintendency revealed that those who were successful did not enter a school district with preconceived plans, but rather developed visions for change collaboratively with others and in response to local needs. “Responsibility for reforming the public schools

cannot rest on one superintendent's shoulders, but one superintendent can be very influential in leading schools to change" (Johnson, 1996a).

Virginia has embarked on significant changes in its public education system. Beginning with the adoption of new, more rigorous Standards of Learning (SOL) in the core academic areas of English, mathematics, science, and history/social science, as well as adoption of assessments designed to gauge student achievement in the SOL, a major paradigm shift has occurred. A lot is at stake. School divisions must be able to answer the call for increased accountability. Student achievement, as measured by the SOL tests, must improve. Schools will have to meet the new accreditation standards. Accountability rests with parents, students, teachers, principals and ultimately superintendents. Public expectation is that superintendents will lead local school divisions to the higher standards.

Additionally, the Virginia General Assembly passed the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 which mandated the "development of strategies to recognize and develop these heightened responsibilities of educators. This Act addresses the evaluation and training of teachers, assistant principals, principals, central office personnel and superintendents with a primary focus on student achievement and safety" (Virginia Department of Education, 2000, p. 5). The Act called for the creation of uniform performance standards guidelines that local school boards could utilize when evaluating superintendents. At a minimum the guidelines had to include "assessing teacher and administrator skills and knowledge, improving student academic progress, providing for school safety and enforcing student discipline" (Virginia Department of Education, 2000, p. 5).

All of these issues point to the need to define the school superintendent's responsibility

and role in current and future educational change. Two state legislatures, Illinois and Virginia, so far have included student learning gains as part of the superintendents' evaluation. According to Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000, p. 62) "This may well be a trend for the 21st century. Whether or not superintendents can measurably affect student achievement has not been the subject of extensive research."

The inclusion of 'improving student academic progress' as a mandatory standard of superintendent performance highlights the critical role of the superintendent in curriculum planning/development, instructional leadership, and, ultimately, student performance results. As a result, superintendents' job responsibilities have been reprioritized, and in some cases redefined, in response to statewide standards and the accompanying accountability issues. Likewise, priorities have been externally set on both the instructional and organizational leadership dimensions of the superintendent's role (DiPaola & Stronge, 2000, p.5).

Keith and Girling (1991) state "organizations, like people, are born to develop and change" (p. 6). Accepting this tenet, an issue key to the superintendency is how that position can effectively manage change to attain the desired outcomes demanded by the community and the educational institution itself. "Managing the change process is the key to successful change" (Keith & Girling, 1991, p. 6). Keith and Girling (1991) firmly believe that "managers need a sense of where management theory has come from as well as how schools and school systems, as organizations, have changed over time in order to be able to plan and direct where they might be able to go in the future" (p. 5).

When considering the superintendent's role in current educational reform efforts and the

community's demand for improvement in student achievement as well as greater accountability for educational outcomes in Virginia, the focus shifts to which aspects of instructional leadership superintendents are utilizing in order to bring about the desired results. The salient question became in those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? The purpose of this study was to explore superintendents' instructional leadership behaviors during an era of educational reform in Virginia.

Background

In 1995 Virginia embarked on a journey to improve the educational opportunity for all public school students. This journey began with revision of the Standards of Learning (SOL) in the core content areas of English, mathematics, science and history/social science. Revision of the standards in the core content areas represented the first changes to the SOL since 1989.

Along with the adoption of new SOL, the Virginia Board of Education developed a four-prong program that includes assessments, expectations for student achievement, revised accreditation standards for schools and requirements for public reporting of individual school achievement results. The SOL assessments are designed to measure student achievement in mastery of the SOL. Students in grades 3, 5, 8 and those enrolled in certain high school courses participate in the assessments in English, mathematics, science and history/social science. Student performance on the assessments is indicated by Pass-Proficient (score of 400-499), Pass-Advanced (score of 500-600) or Fail (score of 0-399). The first SOL tests were administered during the spring of the 1997-98 school year.

The Standards for Accrediting (SOA) Public Schools in Virginia (1997) were revised to

reflect a direct correlation between student achievement on the SOL tests and accreditation. As of July 1, 1998, all public schools were designated as Provisionally Accredited. The SOA set forth full accreditation requirements that are tied directly to SOL test performance. A school must achieve a 70% pass rate on the SOL tests in all four core content areas at grades 3, 5, 8 and end-of-course tests, with the exception of science and history/social science at grade three where a 50% pass rate is the standard, in order to receive a "Fully Accredited" designation.

Schools must continually show improvement toward meeting the 70% benchmark.

Schools which have not been designated as "Fully Accredited" by 2003-04 will be tagged as "Accredited with Warning." School improvement plans must be developed and implemented by any school failing to meet full accreditation standards. Failure to meet full accreditation standards by 2006-07 will result in a school receiving the "Accreditation Denied" designation. As of this writing, consequences for an individual school and/or school division that fails to meet accreditation standards have not been determined.

In addition to performance requirements for schools, the SOA established increased graduation requirements for students along with earning verified units of credit for passing certain SOL tests. Students entering ninth grade during the 1998-99 school year and after are required to obtain twenty-two (22) credits for a standard diploma and twenty-four (24) credits for the advanced studies diploma. Beginning with the ninth grade class in 2000-01, those students must earn the additional units for the specific diploma as well as verified units of credit. Students pursuing the standard diploma will be required to earn a minimum of six verified units of credit. Those verified credits must be two in English, one in mathematics (at or above the level of algebra), one in science, one in history/social science and one of the student's choice.

For the advanced studies diploma students must earn a minimum of nine verified units of credit. Those verified units will be two in English, two in mathematics (at or above the level of algebra), two in science, two in history/social science and one of the student's choice.

Performance on the SOL tests must also be considered as one of multiple criteria for promotion at grades 3, 5, and 8. Students in those grades who fail to pass all SOL tests in the core academic areas must be provided with remediation to assist them in gaining mastery in the SOL. Remediation may include before or after school tutoring, summer school or other remediation.

The final prong in Virginia's educational reform initiative involves public reporting of individual school achievement results. Schools are required to provide an annual School Performance Report Card to parents and the community. The purpose of the School Performance Report Card is to "promote communication and foster mutual understanding with parents and the community" (Virginia Department of Education, 1997). The report cards include information on school, division-wide and state SOL test scores, attendance rates for students, accreditation ratings, incidents of physical violence and weapons possession, graduation rates and performance on Advanced Placement (AP) tests.

The Virginia Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999 highlighted the need to develop uniform standards and evaluation criteria for teachers, administrators and superintendents. "Everyone from classroom teachers to school division superintendents must make the learning of every student the priority driving all other professional responsibilities" (Virginia Department of Education, 2000, p. 5). Accountability, then, does not rest solely upon the shoulders of students but rests with those responsible for providing the environment for

learning.

Therefore, superintendents have been faced with an arduous task of ensuring that all students demonstrate mastery of the SOL objectives as measured by the SOL tests. Clearly all of these issues reflect the building level. However, the focus will ultimately shift to the superintendent and the instructional leadership that position brings to bear. School divisions that adopt the “business as usual” approach to meeting the increased standards will not meet with the expected success. Change in the educational setting, then, is inevitable.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study of leadership skills for the superintendent is based on the *AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency* (1993) and Susan Moore Johnson’s study of the superintendency, *Leading to Change* (1996a). In 1993 the AASA Commission on Standards for the Superintendency initiated the development of professional standards for that position. It was evident that school boards were hiring superintendents and framing their visions without any real sense of effective leadership standards for practice. As a result the AASA Commission studied data from the 1992 *AASA Study of the American School Superintendency*, reviewed research and interviewed those who prepare superintendents for their positions.

The Commission’s efforts resulted in the *AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency* (1993). The eight standards suggest competencies and skills that superintendents should demonstrate for success in educational leadership. The standards are:

1. Leadership and District Culture
2. Policy and Governance
3. Communication and Community Relations

4. **Organizational Management**
5. **Curriculum Planning and Development**
6. **Instructional Management**
7. **Human Resources Management**
8. **Values and Ethics of Leadership.**

“The standards consolidate the knowledge base of educational administration with recent research on performance goals, competencies, and skills needed by effective superintendents.”
(AASA, 1993).

From 1989 to 1992 Susan Moore Johnson conducted a study of the superintendency from the perspective of superintendents new to their current position. Johnson’s study examined the search and selection, leadership and interactions of superintendents and their constituents.

A review of the AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency and Johnson’s report of her study, *Leading to Change*, revealed five consistent themes relative to instructional leadership and the superintendency. These consistent themes created the conceptual framework for this study.

1. **The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.**
2. **Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.**
3. **Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.**
4. **Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of**

ensuring improved student achievement.

5. All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.

Rationale for the Conceptual Framework

1. The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.
2. Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.

Rationale:

AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency (1993)

Five of the standards (1, 2, 3, 4, 8) support the concept that superintendents must be able to develop and clearly articulate a vision and direction for the school district. That vision is developed through fostering collaborative relationships with those inside the organization as well as with the school board and other constituents. The use of a collaborative approach to leadership must permeate throughout the organizational structure.

Johnson's Leading to Change (1996)

Johnson's study of the superintendency revealed "the model of effective leadership that emerged...is a collaborative one, in which superintendents work together with their constituents to improve public education." In order to accomplish the collaborative model of effective leadership, superintendents must practice three types of leadership - educational leadership, managerial leadership and political leadership. Johnson concluded that effective superintendents were very capable in combining all three of these approaches to leadership.

3. **Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.**
4. **Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement.**

Rationale:

AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency (1993)

Three of the professional standards (4, 5, 6) specifically focus on the superintendent's ability to analyze data in order to make decisions regarding the instructional program. Superintendents should demonstrate an understanding of curriculum and be able to develop a strategic plan to address the instructional program. Changes within the curriculum and instructional program to enhance student achievement should incorporate research on teaching and learning.

Johnson's Leading to Change (1996)

Within the collaborative model, superintendents exercise three types of leadership - educational leadership, managerial leadership and political leadership. Two of these, educational leadership and managerial leadership, support the superintendent's need to be able to fully understand and orchestrate the curriculum and instruction process. Educational leadership refers to the superintendent's ability in "diagnosing local educational needs, discerning possibilities for educational improvement, and recommending strategies for improving teaching and learning in their districts." Managerial leadership involves using the "structures of their district organizations to connect school leaders and influence the schools' practices."

5. **All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and**

organizational.

Rationale:

AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency (1993)

Five of the standards (1, 2, 3, 4, 8) highlight the principle that there are many influences from within and outside of the organization. These influences impact organizational, curricular and managerial decisions. A superintendent must be adept in exhibiting leadership through the various contexts in which they operate.

Johnson's Leading to Change (1996)

The third type of leadership exercised by superintendents in a collaborative model is political leadership. Political leadership references the superintendent's ability to interact "with city officials, school board members, and union leaders in an effort to secure the funds, decision-making authority, and public regard needed to improve their schools." The educational and managerial contexts also shape the leadership direction.

Definition of the Problem

Schools in Virginia are faced with the challenge of meeting increased accreditation standards as set forth by the Board of Education. Meeting and exceeding the standards will require significant change or reform in the educational process itself. For the first time accreditation of schools will be directly linked to student performance on criterion referenced tests designed to assess student mastery of the Virginia Standards of Learning. Teachers, administrators, students, parents and the community-at-large are all looking to the superintendent for leadership in guiding schools to meeting the newer, more rigorous accreditation standards.

This study attempted to examine the behaviors of the superintendent during an era of

educational reform in Virginia. The salient question was in those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? To that end, the following questions, based on the conceptual framework discussed above, were answered in this study.

1. Is the leadership style of the superintendent collaborative and inclusive of all constituents?
2. Has the superintendent articulated a vision formulated through a collaborative process?
3. Does the superintendent have an understanding of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement?
4. How does the superintendent employ change processes to impact improved student achievement?
5. Is the superintendent's leadership influenced by historical, community and organizational contexts?

Definitions

Achievement: What students actually learn, as measured by performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments.

Accreditation: Accountability designation assigned to schools based on effectiveness and attainment of prescribed goals of student achievement as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning Tests (Virginia Board of Education, 1999).

Collaboration: "To achieve greater understanding through exchange of information and ideas among both internal and external groups

(Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 31).

Educational Change: The process of helping schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs and/or practices with better ones (Fullan, 1991).

Improvement: For purposes of this study, improvement is defined as positive change of 10 percentage points or greater in at least nine (9) of the sixteen (16) areas reported for the 1998 and 1999 SOL assessments.

Instructional Leadership: The ability to impact the curricular design to enhance teaching and learning to ensure that students achieve at the highest levels possible.

Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools (SOL):

Academic targets and expectations for teachers to teach and students to learn in four core subject areas of mathematics, science, English, and history/social science (Virginia Department of Education, 1995).

Superintendent: The appointed or elected head of a local school division/district.

Vision: “A mental image of a possible and desirable future state of the organization. Vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985, p. 89).

Overview of Methodology and Limitations

The focus of this study was to ascertain the instructional role of the superintendent in effecting improvement in student achievement as measured by the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments. Qualitative methodology was selected since the focus was to determine if the perspective of the superintendent's leadership role is congruent with the areas enumerated in the conceptual framework.

Data were gathered through conducting semi-structured interviews with superintendents of school divisions that had schools identified on the 1999 Virginia Department of Education's list of "Most Improved Schools Recognized for Academic Gains." Principals of the schools identified on the list also participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews sought to determine if congruence exists between the practicing superintendent's perspective of their role in effecting improvement in student achievement and those areas outlined in the conceptual framework. Information from the principal interview served as a check to assist in interpretation of the superintendent's perspective.

There are some limitations noted as a result of this type of study.

1. Only superintendents who had at least three schools on the "Most Improved" list were included in the improving divisions group.
2. The small sample drawn from the limited school divisions on the list and within a 150-mile radius of the Hampton Roads region may limit generalizability.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

History/Background of the Standards of Learning in Virginia

Virginia adopted and published its first Standards of Learning Objectives beginning in 1981. Those standards set forth a framework for instruction in grades K-12 in the following areas: language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and health education. The objectives were developed each summer during 1981 and 1982 by teachers, administrators, and university personnel along with the Virginia Department of Education. The Standards of Learning Objectives were not designed to replace existing curriculum, however they were to be incorporated in a local school division's curriculum. Implementation of the Standards of Learning was expected to occur in the fall of 1983 (Davis, S. J. personal communication, December 1, 1982).

Assessment materials were developed in 1984-85 to accompany the Standards of Learning.

The Standards of Learning Program (SOL) consists of a set of objectives which students are expected to achieve at each grade level and a companion set of assessment instruments which teachers may use in determining whether students have achieved each objective (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

Even with this statement of purpose for the SOL, school divisions were not required to use the SOL program. School divisions were required to meet state accreditation standards which stated:

Each school shall provide specific learning objectives to be achieved by students at successive levels of development and shall continually assess the progress of each student in relation to these objectives and the goals of education in Virginia. School divisions

which develop their own learning objectives are required by the accreditation standards (Standard B-3) to use the SOL as a reference. Those which use a different assessment program for language arts and mathematics in grades 1-6 are required by the Standards of Quality to have it approved by the Department of Education. Such approval is not necessary for other areas (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

The mid 1980s saw a national call to improve educational opportunities for students. Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), *Carnegie Task Force Report* (1986), *California's Commission on the Teaching Profession* (1985), *Holmes Group Teacher Education Reforms* (1986) and the *Governor's Commission* (1986) focused on the need for extensive school site reform in order to improve education (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). Subsequently, Virginia set out to revise its original Standards of Learning in an effort to improve student achievement.

Revisions to the original standards occurred between 1988 and 1989. While improvement in student achievement had been noted since 1981, the revisions sought to incorporate advances in technology as well as prepare students for life in the twenty-first century.

The Standards of Learning program is designed to identify what students are expected to accomplish, to provide a method of determining what has been learned and to encourage teachers to place emphasis on critical areas in the curriculum. It is not intended to reduce the total school program to a single list of objectives; instead, it presents the essential content of the curriculum for classes throughout the state. Each school system is encouraged to enrich its basic curriculum to meet the needs of all students (Virginia Department of Education, 1988, p. v).

In 1990 Virginia shifted its focus from the Standards of Learning to a new initiative -

World Class Education. World Class Education was a ten year, research based plan designed to improve educational opportunities for all children by the year 2000 (Virginia Department of Education, 1990). There were four key components of the World Class Education Plan.

1. **Competency areas would be identified that all students must meet including reading, writing, speaking listening, problem-solving skills, computer skills, mathematics and science.**
2. **The Common Core of Learning would define what all students should know and be able to do upon graduation including subject areas, skills and attitudes. This changes the emphasis from “what teachers teach (curriculum) to what students actually learn (achievement).”**
3. **Student mastery would be measured and schools would be held accountable for results. This created a focus on outcomes.**
4. **Implementation of a research plan to explore and implement programs of best practice in schools across the Commonwealth (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).**

A significant amount of research and development was undertaken to realize the full scope of the World Class Education Plan. The difference between the Common Core of Learning and the Standards of Learning program is the fact that the “common core encourages development of curriculum focused on critical thinking, interdisciplinary learning, problem solving, global issues, and practical applications of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in solving complex problems” (Virginia Department of Education, 1991).

The World Class Education Plan was short lived. Abruptly, Virginia aborted its efforts towards adoption of the Common Core of Learning. There was great opposition voiced

surrounding the implications of outcome based educational objectives.

Recognizing the continued need to address improved educational opportunities, the Virginia Board of Education took an important step to raise the expectations for all students. In April 1994 committees of parents, teachers, principals, school board members, and community leaders, under the direction of four school divisions, began the task of reviewing and revising the Standards of Learning for Virginia. The committees sought input from national consultants and public hearings were held to gain input from Virginia's citizens (Virginia Department of Education, 1995).

In June 1995, the Virginia Board of Education adopted the new Standards of Learning in English, mathematics and science. A great deal of controversy loomed around the history/social science standards and those were not adopted until the fall of 1995.

The new Standards of Learning are important because they set reasonable targets and expectations for what teachers need to teach and students need to learn. Clear, concise academic standards will let parents and teachers know what is expected of students and each student's performance and achievement can be measured against the standards. This requirement provides greater accountability on the part of the public schools and gives the local school boards the autonomy and flexibility they need to offer programs that best meet the educational needs of students (Virginia Department of Education, 1995, p. iii).

The goal of the Board of Education is to "raise student achievement through accountability for results so that all our school children, not just a lucky few, will be prepared to compete successfully in the global economy of the 21st century" (Virginia Department of Education, 1999).

Superintendent Accountability

Accountability of superintendents for instructional leadership has become a focal point in the standards movement gripping the country. The Virginia General Assembly, through the passage of the Education Accountability and Quality Enhancement Act of 1999, solidified the accountability of superintendents for instructional leadership. The Act called for the establishment of guidelines for the evaluation and training of teachers, assistant principals, principals, central office personnel, and superintendents particularly in the areas of student achievement and safety. "Superintendents and central office personnel must plan and support instructional programs that facilitate student achievement at the school and classroom levels" (Virginia Department of Education, 2000, p. 5).

Five major categories of evaluation criteria create the framework for evaluation guidelines in Virginia. The categories are:

- Planning and Assessment**
- Instructional Leadership**
- Safety and Organizational Management for Learning**
- Communication and Community Relations**
- Professionalism (Virginia Department of Education, 2000).**

Four of the five categories - Planning and Assessment, Instructional Leadership, Safety and Organizational Management for Learning, and Communication and Community Relations - parallel areas of the conceptual framework developed for this study.

The evolution to including instructional leadership as part of the superintendent's evaluation represents a transformation from superintendent evaluations where the focus was on

“general effectiveness” according to the 1982 and 1992 AASA Study of the American School Superintendency (Glass, et al., 2000).

The criteria used most often to evaluate superintendents according to the 2000 Study is that of periodic/systematic accountability, followed by assessing performance of district attempts to meet standards (state assessment) and compliance with board policy. Two related criteria are improving performance and needs assessment. The accountability theme is strong, and reflects a decade-long trend toward high-stakes testing across the nation (Glass, et al., 2000, pp. 62-63).

General Research on the Superintendency

The call for educational reform across the nation resulted in numerous efforts to address the instructional process itself. Most reform activities have focused on the individual school as a unit of decision-making increasing opportunities for participatory involvement by students and staff (Keith & Girling, 1991; Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). At the forefront of the reforms was school renewal and site-based management. Goodlad (1984) stated “significant educational improvement of schooling, not mere tinkering, requires that we focus on entire schools, not just teachers or principals or curricula or organization or school-community relations but all of these and more.”

Change or innovation is a topic constantly discussed in the educational world. Schools, colleges and universities are always changing either by deliberate design or by whim or fate. Students, faculty members, administrators and the general public are concerned about the ability of educational organizations to adapt in the face of new demands, and, as a consequence, the careers of educational administrators reflect their ability to stimulate

and manage change (Baldrige and Deal, 1975, p.1).

The role of the superintendent is noticeably absent from discussions on educational reform (Bjork, 1993; Cuban, 1984; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh & Sybouts, 1996; Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). Leadership at the building level has been the focus that emerged from early effective schools research. “Although these studies made important contributions to the education reform literature and administrative practice, the instructional leadership role of superintendents, those at the other end of the school hierarchy, has been largely ignored” (Bjork, 1993, p. 249).

Superintendents as the instructional leaders of the school division are expected to lead schools toward improvement in educational opportunities for students. Educators and superintendents have not been key players in the educational reform efforts that have taken place since *A Nation at Risk*. “Harvard’s Jerome Murphy notes the school superintendent has been the ‘forgotten player in the game of school reform’” (in Norton, et al., 1996, p. 29).

Early reform efforts (1960s and 1970s) focused on decentralizing school districts which were perceived as highly bureaucratic organizations. Superintendents were ultimately responsible for the decentralization and reform activities (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). A high turnover in the superintendency occurred during this period. “A pervasive point raised in the majority of the reform efforts is the need to grant principals and teachers greater autonomy, professional responsibility and acknowledgment” (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988, p.2). Goodlad (1984) felt it was important to reduce rather than increase district-wide programs and demands. Geisert (in Keith & Girling, 1991) suggests that the participatory approach leaves organizations leaderless, distributing responsibilities among a number of individuals, none of whom is accountable.

However, Keith and Girling (1991) believe that the participatory approach to management seeks ways to delegate responsibility and accountability to individuals within the organization. "Although participation suggests greater decentralization and a more democratic approach to management, developing a participatory organization requires strong leadership where traditional structures and procedures run counter" (Keith & Girling, 1991, p. 333).

It has been suggested that one reason the reform movement has not focused on the superintendent is that, in general, the movement brought a disenchantment with bureaucratic, centralized forms of school management, of which the superintendent was the chief representative (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 29).

The challenge for the superintendent becomes the ability to move from a traditionally centralized, bureaucratic role to a more collaborative, participatory role. Naisbitt and Toffler (in Konnert & Augenstein, 1995) believe that educational organizations must become more responsive and innovative. This can only occur if the organizational structure becomes less hierarchial.

Wissler and Ortiz (1988) purport that an

intentional leadership style is required for organizational change which transforms a bureaucratic institution into a decentralized one through seven stages.

Successful change relies on the intentional leader's control of the technological core of the organization - information - through three critical points - the organizational members, the use of metaphors and the achievements of both the school personnel and students (p. 2).

Control of the technological core or information by organizational leaders "contributes to successful change processes in two different ways: to reduce conflict and a way to determine

decisions and actions” (Wissler & Ortiz, 1988, p. 4).

In an effort to reduce hierarchal decision-making superintendents will have to spend more time and energy with individual schools in order to foster decision-making at the building level. “Collaborative networks will replace bureaucratic networks in significant decision-making processes” (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995, p. 42).

Transformational Leadership

A focus on “transformational leadership” has been credited with bringing about positive change in business and its application has been used to critique school reform (Owens, 1995). This emphasis on “transformational leadership” has occurred in education during the 1990s (Burns, 1978; Johnson, 1996a; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Schlechty, 2000). The 1970s and 1980s saw a great deal of focus on management behaviors (Blumberg & Blumberg, 1985; Cuban, 1988; Norton, et al., 1996).

Sarason (in Norton, et al., 1996) suggests that a major reason for the failure of many of the reform initiatives is that they require an alteration of the existing power relations in schools. Traditional relationships and structures must give way to relationships and structures that provide increased opportunities for shared decision making. Transformational leadership is intended to accomplish this. Transformational leadership “empowers those involved in the decision-making process and helps them recognize what needs to be done to reach a desired outcome” (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 29).

Transformational leadership involves risk taking by a superintendent. However, this risk taking does not in any way diminish the superintendent’s significance. Actually, a higher level of leadership ability is required of the transformational leader than the traditional or transactional

leader (Norton, et al., 1996; Owens, 1995).

Mitchell and Tucker (in Norton, et al., 1996) and Sergiovanni (1996) delineate the key differences between transactional (traditional) superintendents and transformational superintendents. The table below illustrates the differences.

Table 1: Comparison of Transactional and Transformational Superintendents

TRANSACTIONAL SUPERINTENDENTS	TRANSFORMATIONAL SUPERINTENDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek indirect control through attention to the design of district organizational structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give primary attention to staff skills, beliefs and expertise rather than structures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on defining job functions and developing district policies and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct efforts to building and strengthening organizational norms and attitudes; striving to establish common meaning systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe success in improving organizational operations results in school instructional improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe that quality education will result when professional staff agree about educational goals and strategies for their attainment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrate on creating and stabilizing district programs while maintaining a high sensitivity to hierarchy and standardization of procedures and practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on transforming the goals of the organization and aspirations of the participants than on implementing existing programs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oriented to carry out the kinds of structural changes mandated by restructuring initiatives (Mitchell & Tucker, in Norton, et.al, 1996; Owens, 1995)

Superintendents who do not assume the role of transformational leader “will not let go of enough power to permit the development of responsibilities and leadership abilities needed to make shared decision making function smoothly” (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 30).

Several authors including Karl Weick (in Sergiovanni, 1996), Norton, et al., (1996) and Konnert and Augenstein (1995) have referred to school systems as “loosely coupled systems.”

According to Weick (in Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 160), in loosely coupled systems

shared premises, culture, persistence, clan control, improvisation, memory and imitation count more and have more effective influence than do strategies that rely on detailing job specifications, engineering work flow, creating management protocols that tightly align various school functions together, or introducing other related structural changes.

Sergiovanni (1996, p. 157) puts forth the concept that

mindsapes function as practical theories that influence what we see, what we believe, what issues we consider important, and ultimately what we do. Our realities about change issues and the change strategies we choose are a function of our mindsapes of schools. When our change strategies do not work, we are prone to think that the problem is with our choices. So, we search the same mindsapes again looking for still another strategy to try. Rarely do we consider the possibility that our mindsapes may be wrong.

However, change will remain a “vexing issue” until mindsapes are realized that deinstitutionalize the need for change and result in change becoming a part of everyday life (Sergiovanni, 1996).

The meaning of change itself can be changed so that it becomes a natural part of the school. But for this kind of deinstitutionalization to change to occur, we must commit over the long haul to a different theory of schooling - an inside rather than an outside theory, a gemeinschaft theory rather than a gesellschaft theory, a theory that is more

norms-based than rules based (Sergiovanni, 1996, p. 166).

Superintendents can no longer afford to be forgotten. "For they know, and a growing number of researchers and policy makers are coming to understand, that widespread improvements in schools are unlikely to be realized unless superintendents are more substantially involved in the reform agenda" (Murphy, in Norton, et al., 1996, p. 29).

Business and the military have recognized the importance of leadership in organizational reform. To that end they have spent millions of dollars to train leaders. Louis Gerstner, CEO of IBM, writing in *Reinventing Education Entrepreneurship in America's Public Schools* (cited in Norton, et al., 1996, p. 29)

Leaders are especially critical to organizations that must adapt and change. Without a leader who can articulate a new mission, an organization will plow straight ahead, a creature of habit. Without a leader who can organize and motivate others to pursue a new strategy, an organization will follow its traditional modes of operation, or pursue the private agendas of its members or employees. Without leaders, organizations will do the same thing tomorrow that they did today.

Support for the Conceptual Framework

From 1989 to 1992 Susan Moore Johnson undertook a study of the superintendency from the perspective of superintendents new to their current position. Johnson's (1996a) study examined the search and selection, leadership and interactions of superintendents and their constituents to understand how leadership is portrayed/rendered in the superintendency. Utilizing a case study approach, Johnson followed twelve newly appointed superintendents through their first two years of tenure.

Current educational reform demands and constituent beliefs have school divisions and communities looking for “heroic leaders - those mythic, take-charge, no-nonsense experts who dispel doubt, simplify problems, provide solutions, command respect, ensure compliance and fix things fast” (Johnson, 1996b, p. 47). The reality is that today’s superintendents work in very complex environments.

Today’s school leaders must understand both the limits and the potential of their position, carefully balancing their use of positional authority with their reliance on others, gradually building both a capacity and widespread support for shared leadership and collaborative change (Johnson, 1996a, p. 11).

Public school reform is demanding major changes in the educational system, particularly in the realm of instruction. Communities are looking to superintendents as the appointed leader of a school division to orchestrate the necessary reforms to improve student achievement and respond to increased accountability. In order to accomplish these goals, superintendents must move away from the traditional, form authority of a single source. Educators throughout the organization must be able to interact and participate in “defining problems, devising solutions, and mobilizing support for new initiatives” (Johnson, 1996a, p. 274). Thus, “the superintendent no longer acts as the sole educational authority but rather has the potential to be an influential educational leader whose authority is grounded in expertise and reaffirmed by constituents’ respect and trust” (Johnson, 1996a, p. 275).

Collaborative Leadership

As a result of Johnson’s (1996a, p. xii) investigation, “the model of effective leadership that emerged... is a collaborative one, in which superintendents work together with their

constituents to improve public education.” Three types of leadership were also practiced by the superintendents studied - educational leadership, managerial leadership and political leadership. Educational leadership refers to the superintendent’s ability in “diagnosing local educational needs, discerning possibilities for educational improvement, and recommending strategies for improving teaching and learning in their districts” (p. xii). Managerial leadership involves using the “structures of their district organizations to connect school leaders and influence the schools’ practices” (xii). Political leadership references the superintendent’s ability to interact “with city officials, school board members, and union leaders in an effort to secure the funds, decision-making authority, and public regard needed to improve their schools” (p. xii). Johnson concluded that effective superintendents were very capable in combining all of the above approaches to leadership.

Vision

A compelling argument is made throughout leadership literature about the need to develop and clearly articulate a vision to move the organization forward (AASA, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Gertsner, 1994; Johnson, 1996a; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Norton, et al., 1996; Owens, 1992; Schlechty, 2000; Thomson, 1993; Wallace, 1992; Withrow, et al., 1999). During an era of reform, a vision is essential to maintaining “a clear focus on the future” (Schlechty, 2000, p. 166). “Vision refers to a picture of the future with some implicit or explicit commentary on why people should strive to create that future” (Kotter, 1996, p. 68).

Vision becomes a powerful tool to “clarify the general direction for change,” motivate “people to take action in the right direction,” and “coordinate the actions of different people” (Kotter, 1996, pp. 68-69). In order for the vision to truly become powerful, the meaning must be

shared by all impacted by its intent (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Schlechty, 2000). Schlechty (2000, p. 170) succinctly states “Common visions, like common culture, create shared meaning and inspire shared commitments over time.” Vision, therefore, becomes a cornerstone for leadership during periods of change and reform.

Instructional Leadership

The instructional leadership role of the superintendent is an evolving research area. Historically the superintendent’s role has centered around assisting school boards in designing policy and effecting policy implementation and general management functions (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Johnson, 1996a; Wallace, 1985). The focus on school reform since the 1980s has resulted in a shift to an emphasis on the superintendent’s role in instructional leadership. Bjork (1993) states “the manner in which superintendents enact their management role may influence the quality of instruction in their districts. This suggests that superintendents have opportunities to serve as instructional leaders at the district level” (p. 247).

Earlier work by Murphy, Hallinger and Peterson (in Bjork, 1993) concluded that “districts with excellent student achievement have superintendents who are personally involved” (p. 252) with the district’s curriculum and instruction program. The manner in which the superintendent exercises this involvement depends on the role that they assume for leadership - either managerial or consultative. In the managerial role, the superintendent may interpret the instructional leadership role as a separate function, apart from ensuring stability of the organization. Superintendents can also use managerial activities to directly or indirectly influence curriculum, instruction and learning. In the consultative role, the superintendent must take into account the interactive side where managerial structures give way to actions designed to

create a culture for establishing “a shared vision, common goals and encouraging leadership throughout the organization” (Bjork, 1993, p. 257).

Bredeson (1996) identified four instructional leadership roles that superintendents engage in - instructional visionary, instructional collaborator, instructional supporter and instructional delegator. The complex nature of the superintendency has a direct bearing on how much time superintendents actually dedicate to curriculum and instruction responsibilities.

The interests, training, and background of a superintendent influence how that person chooses to relate to curriculum and instruction. Local conditions can also have a strong impact on how a superintendent views curriculum, as can local, state, and national laws, which can affect what action is taken. A superintendent should make a self-assessment and acknowledge personal interests and expertise while consciously deciding what role to play in the area of curriculum and instruction (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 249).

Several issues can influence a superintendent’s involvement with curriculum and instruction, including the size of the school division and whether or not the division is highly centralized or decentralized. Norton, et al., (1996, p.250) believe “that the best way for the superintendent to address curricular issues is to deploy the administrative staff in a way that uses the expertise of each staff member.

Ultimately, the superintendent should, by direct involvement or through delegation, arrive at a plan for capitalizing on the staff’s expertise to ensure that the strongest possible instructional program and the most appropriate curriculum is made available to each child and every youth enrolled in the system (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 250).

Therefore, “the priority the superintendent places on curriculum will determine to a large degree

the quality of educational program made available for children and youth in the district” (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 269).

Change Mangement

Management of change has evolved as another key responsibility of the superintendency. Much has been written about an organization’s leader effectively managing change as a means to bring about improvement (Baldrige & Deal, 1975; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Johnson, 1996a; Norton, et al., 1996; Wissler & Ortiz, 1988). A premise of educational reform in this country is that existing practices must be reviewed with an eye towards changing practices to improve educational opportunities for all children. Glass, in the 1992 Study of the Superintendency revealed that “superintendents’ responses indicate that many aspects of the profession must change if schools are to meet the challenges of the 21st century” (p. xiii).

Sergiovanni (1996) captured the essence of pressures superintendents face to implement and manage change -

Most school leaders care and try to do what is best for students. They are, however, under enormous pressure to change things for the better. In true North American fashion these changes are expected to be implemented quickly. This quick fix pressure leads many school leaders to look for easy answers that do not result in meaningful change (p. xiii).

Baldrige and Deal (1975) warn of adopting innovations as a means of addressing change. This action implies commercialism or a product to hold on to which causes educational administrators to overlook opportunities to develop problem-solving capacity within the

organization.

We must not be in the business of disseminating a particularly exciting new product; we must be in the business of creating organizations with built-in capacities for assessing needs and creating viable alternatives. The adoption of any specific innovation is a sideline activity that must not consumer our energies. Our continuing enterprise should be the building of flexible organizations responsive to environments, organizations with reserves of expertise and resources to sustain long-range problem solving (p. 7).

Expanding on his theory of change for education, Sergiovanni (1996) created a structural-functional view of schools and change. He used an image of cogs and gears to represent the various dimensions of the organizational structure of schools.

In this view of schools, school leaders were supposed to work hard to improve things by introducing changes that got control of the main gear and pin - not dictatorial or mean-spirited in this effort. With this model effective leaders practiced “enlightened human-relations leadership” that was sensitive to the needs of teachers and others, and that would motivate them to accept and implement the desired change. Once all main gears and pins were in control, all other pins and wheels would move in predictable and reliable ways. Thus the leader’s intent would then be accomplished and schools would get better (p. 157).

A link has to be made between planning for curricular and instructional changes, and implementation of the plan. The superintendent has a prime opportunity to exhibit instructional leadership through knowledge of curriculum and instruction, monitoring to ensure internal consistency in the scope and sequence of the curriculum, and acknowledging budget implications

(Norton, et al., 1996). "In a society such as ours schools need to be in a continuous state of adjustment. Change has been a constant" (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 51).

Contextual Influences

As superintendents engage in the business of providing instructional leadership to improve student achievement, they cannot ignore the influence of the various contexts - historical, community, and organizational - that impact their work. Johnson's (1996a) study of the superintendency makes a strong argument about the superintendent's ability to navigate the political and educational contexts. Superintendents provide "leadership that informs, inspires and engages the community, empowers teachers and convinces policymakers that schools can and must carry out the mandates of a diverse and rapidly changing society" (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 51).

Hord (in Glass, 1992) states "many educators believe that as policymakers become frustrated with the slow rate of school restructuring/reform success in the 1990s, there will be renewed and significant attention paid to improving the executive leadership of school districts, namely, the superintendent" (p. 19). Cuban (1988) revealed

to exercise real leadership a superintendent must play three roles, often simultaneously - politician, manager, teacher. The measure of a superintendent's political skill - but not necessarily of his or her leadership is survival for a decade or longer in one locale (p. 29).

Pitner and Ogawa (1981) explored two dimensions of educational organizations, one of which focused on the constraints imposed on superintendents by social and organizational structures.

...it was found that societal structures and preferences both serve as the raw materials of

superintendents' work and demarcate the boundaries within which superintendents may operation. It was also found that superintendents play an important role in the translation of societal preferences into their schools' policies and practices. It was found, too, that superintendents are guided by conventional social, economic, and political structures as they seek information from organizational and environmental sources (Pitner & Ogawa, 1981, p. 61).

The Kentucky Superintendent Assessment Program includes eleven (11) dimensions of the superintendency, grouped into four major areas: Area 1 - Taking Educational Initiatives; Area 2- Analyzing and Judging Educational Problems; Area 3 - Building and Maintaining Education Teams; Area 4 - Expanding Learning (Norton, et al., 1996). The four major areas contain the following specific dimensions which share common points with the conceptual framework.

Area 1: Taking Educational Initiatives

Dimension 1. Encourage Innovation

Dimension 2. Planning and Implementing Strategic Change

Dimension 3. Serving the Needs of Diverse Constituencies

Area 2: Analyzing and Judging Educational Problems

Dimension 4. Acquiring and Interpreting Key Information

Dimension 5. Resisting Premature Judgement

Dimension 6. Resolving Complex Problems

Area 3: Building and Maintaining Educational Teams

Dimension 7. Communicating Expectations

Dimension 8. Developing and Empowering Others

Dimension 9. Balancing Complex Demands**Area 4: Expanding Learning****Dimension 10. Understanding Personal Strengths****Dimension 11. Acquiring New Learning (Norton, et al., 1996)**

The Kentucky report emphasized “that superintendents viewed their leadership role in terms of being keenly aware of research about instructional strategies and technology, seeing the big picture, and motivating people to understand and implement the mission of education” (Norton, et al., 1996, p. 58).

Table 2 summarizes the literature support for the conceptual framework. Each area of the conceptual framework is presented along with literature citations referenced throughout this chapter.

Table 2: Literature Support for the Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework	Citations
<p>1. The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.</p>	<p>AASA, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Forsyth, 1992; Gertsner, 1994; Johnson, 1996a; Keith and Girling, 1991; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Nasbitt and Toffler in Konnert and Augenstein, 1995; Norton, et. al., 1996; Owens, 1995; Wissler and Ortiz, 1988; Withrow, et al., 1999</p>
<p>2. Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.</p>	<p>AASA, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Gerstner, 1994; Johnson, 1996a; Konnert and Augenstein, 1995; Norton, et. al., 1996; Owens, 1995; Thomson, 1992; Wallace, 1992; Withrow, et al., 1999</p>
<p>3. Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.</p>	<p>AASA, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Cuban, 1984; DiPaola & Stronge, 2001; Glass, et al., 2000; Goodlad, 1984; Johnson, 1996a; McCleary, 1992; Norton, et al., 1996; Thomson, 1992; Wallace, 1992; Withrow, et al., 1999</p>
<p>4. Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of insuring improved student achievement.</p>	<p>AASA, 1993; Baldrige and Deal, 1975; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Johnson, 1996a; Norton, et al., 1996; Pitner & Ogawa, 1981; Sergiovanni, 1996; Thomson, 1992; Wallace, 1992; Wissler and Ortiz, 1988;</p>
<p>5. All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.</p>	<p>AASA, 1993; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Cuban, 1988; Deal, 1992; Glass, et al., 2000; Johnson, 1996a; Johnson, 1996b; Norton, et al., 1996; VA DOE, 1995; Wallace, 1992; Wissler and Ortiz, 1988</p>

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Question

This study attempted to examine the behaviors of the superintendent during an era of educational reform in Virginia. The salient question was in those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? The following questions, based on the conceptual framework, were answered in this study.

- 1. Is the leadership style of the superintendent collaborative and inclusive of all constituents?**
- 2. Has the superintendent articulated a vision formulated through a collaborative process?**
- 3. Does the superintendent have an understanding of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement?**
- 4. How does the superintendent employ change processes to impact improved student achievement?**
- 5. Is the superintendent's leadership influenced by historical, community and organizational contexts?**

Research Design

Sample

Participants selected for this study included those school divisions that had schools identified on the Virginia Department of Education's 1999 list of "Most Improved Schools Recognized for Academic Gains," and demonstrating improvement (as defined earlier) from 1998-1999. School divisions not included on the "Most Improved Schools" list and failing to

make significant improvement (as defined earlier) were also involved in the study to determine if the superintendent behaviors outlined in the conceptual framework were evident in those divisions.

School divisions selected for the study reflected an organizational pattern in which the superintendent is the direct supervisor of the principal. Total school division enrollment did not exceed 5000 students. (Enrollment data were taken from the 1997-98 Superintendent's Annual Report for Virginia, Virginia Department of Education.) Superintendent's Study Regions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8 were represented. These regions were included due to the number of divisions meeting both the total student enrollment criteria and inclusion on the state's "Most Improved List" for 1999. Additionally, all divisions are within a 150 mile radius of Hampton Roads.

The same superintendent must have served the division during the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years. Also, principals must have served in that capacity at the same school for both school years. This continuity of leadership was necessary since change literature reflects that it takes at least five years of the same leadership in order to realize systemic change. It was important for this study to have consistent leadership in place to determine if alignment existed between the superintendents' perceptions of their behaviors, the principals' perceptions of the superintendent's behaviors and improved student achievement.

For purposes of this study, improvement in performance on the 1998 and 1999 SOL assessments was defined as positive change of ten (10) percentage points or greater in at least nine (9) of the sixteen (16) areas reported. Lack of improvement was noted as a positive change in six (6) or fewer of the sixteen (16) areas reported. The eligible divisions represented 16% of the divisions of the size parameters previously outlined. Seven divisions meeting the criteria for

improvement were contacted by letter inviting them to participate in the study. Four agreed to participate and are represented as Superintendents 1 - 4 in the results. Nine divisions meeting the sample criteria and not demonstrating improvement were contacted by letter and invited to participate in the study. Four agreed to participate and are represented as Superintendents 5 - 8 in the results. The Invitation to Participate letter and the Informed Consent Form can be found in Appendix A.

Data Collection and Protocols

Qualitative methodology was selected to gather data responses for analysis. The grounded theory approach which seeks to generate and test theory drove data collection and analysis (Strauss, 1987). Data were collected through conducting semi-structured interviews with superintendents of school divisions selected in the sampling process. Principals of the selected divisions were also interviewed utilizing the semi-structured interview format and interview responses were written. The interviews sought to determine if congruence existed between the practicing superintendent's perspective of their behaviors effecting improvement in student achievement and those areas outlined in the conceptual framework. Interview questions were worded in an open-ended format and were seeking language and/or behaviors that were congruent with language and/or behaviors identified in the conceptual framework. Interview questions were reviewed by a practicing superintendent to determine if the questions would accurately solicit information required for the study. Appropriate revisions to the questions were made as a result of that input. Additionally, the design and protocols were approved by the Human Subjects Committee.

All interviews were conducted by telephone with superintendents and principals between

March and June 2001. The average superintendent interview was 35 minutes and 20 minutes for principals. Interview protocols for both the superintendent and principal are located in Appendix A.

Additionally, principals interviewed completed the Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey (SILS).

The Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey is based on the work of Watts (1992) and is designed to measure areas that have been defined in previous research as roles and responsibilities of superintendents when leading the district in areas of curriculum and instruction (Morgan and Petersen, 2000, pp. 7-8).

Surveys were sent and returned by facsimile after the interview. The SILS instrument is contained in Appendix A.

Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey (SILS) (Watts, 1992)

The Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey (SILS) “was developed based on the literature that reflected the role expectations regarding superintendents and instruction” (Watts, 1992, p. 36). The SILS utilizes a 4-point Likert continuum for responses. High involvement is scored 4 points while low involvement is scored as 1 point. There are twelve (12) facets of the instructional program addressed in the survey.

1. Collaboratively developing goals
2. Evaluating instructional effectiveness
3. Facilitating instruction through budget
4. Planning for instruction
5. Supervising instruction

6. **Monitoring instructional programs**
7. **Developing principals as instructional leaders**
8. **Developing instructional policies**
9. **Reviewing research**
10. **Selecting personnel (at any level)**
11. **Facilitating staff development**
12. **Communicating system expectations**

Content validity for the SILS was achieved through evaluation of four criteria. First, “the survey items were reflective of the literature, being based on their formulation.” Second, “a sample of students of educational administration reviewed and offered revisions to make the instrument more easily understandable.” Third, “a group of practitioners of educational administration reviewed the survey, contributing comments and revisions toward further clarifying the identified 12 tasks impacting on instruction.” Finally, “a sample of current local superintendents reviewed the instrument for applicability to the real tasks regarding instructional leadership of the superintendent” (Watts, 1992, p. 44).

Most revisions to the original survey were not substantive in nature, but rather of a semantic nature. “The input of these respondents assisted greatly in the development of a clear, succinctly worded survey that, according to the subjects in the content validity survey, was designed to accurately collect the data that were required for this study” (Watts, 1992, p. 44).

Morgan and Petersen (2000) utilized the SILS in their study of the superintendent’s role as instructional leader. The instrument was completed by building principals and school board members. A two-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the SILS data in their

study. Their findings were consistent with those in Watts' 1992 study that "found that superintendents with a high level of instructional involvement consciously served as chief instructional facilitators for their school systems. The high level of instructional involvement by the superintendents had a direct relationship to the academic success of students" (Morgan & Petersen, 2000, p. 22).

Data Analysis

Responses from both the superintendent and principal interviews were analyzed in relation to the conceptual framework utilizing the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). Employing the constant comparative method was feasible because this study not only sought to test the conceptual framework, but also sought to determine if other areas evolved regarding superintendents instructional leadership, thus testing and generating theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). The constant comparative method involved joint coding and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Through this process, interview responses were coded and analyzed simultaneously. Coding was very explicit and all data were coded into as many categories as possible. Responses from superintendents were coded by questions and compared with each other. Principal responses were coded by question and compared with each other. Finally, responses were coded and compared with the five areas of the conceptual framework. All data were placed in a matrix (see Chapter 4). Validity of the analysis was confirmed by the writer's advisor who did an independent analysis of interview results.

Two types of properties and categories emerged through this method: those constructed via literature search and the resulting conceptual framework, and those gleaned from the language of the interview setting (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Of particular note was the analysis

of responses from superintendents and divisions not on the list of “Most Improved Schools” and the resulting instructional leadership behaviors conveyed. “The constant comparative method is concerned with generating and plausibly suggesting many categories, properties and hypotheses about general problems. Further, no attempt is made by the constant comparative method to ascertain either the universality or the proof of suggested causes or other properties” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 104).

The SILS survey served to triangulate the data obtained via interviews with superintendents and principals. Data from the SILS survey were analyzed by assigning each of the twelve items to the corresponding area of the conceptual framework. Ratings were then averaged for each superintendent to determine their level of involvement in the instructional program. Finally, an analysis of superintendent interviews, principal interviews, and SILS responses was undertaken to determine congruence between superintendent self-reports of behaviors, principal reports of superintendent behaviors, SILS responses and the five areas of the conceptual framework.

Interview questions for both the superintendent and principal interviews, as well as the SILS items, were aligned with the five areas of the conceptual framework as an additional means of ensuring content validity. Content validity for the SILS was previously presented in this chapter. Both the conceptual framework and the SILS were based on the research of the instructional roles and responsibilities of superintendents. Table 3 presents the relationship between the conceptual framework and the instruments used for data collection in this study.

Table 3: Relationship Between the Conceptual Framework and Instruments

Conceptual Framework 1: The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.		
Superintendent	Principal	SILS
1. Describe your overall leadership style.	1.A. Is there a clearly stated vision or clear expectations for instruction?	1. Collaboratively developing goals
3. Describe your approach to leadership as it pertains to instruction.	1.B. What is that vision and how was it developed? 2. What has been the superintendent's approach to instructional leadership?	
Conceptual Framework 2: Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.		
Superintendent	Principal	SILS
2.A. What is your vision? 2. B. Where did it come from?	1.A. Is there a clearly stated vision or clear expectations for instruction? 1.B. What is that vision and how was it developed?	1. Collaboratively developing goals 3. Evaluating instructional effectiveness 7. Developing principals as instructional leaders 8. Developing instructional policies 9. Reviewing research 10. Selecting personnel 12. Communicating system expectations

Conceptual Framework 3: Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.		
Superintendent	Principal	SILS
<p>A continuum exists ranging from high knowledge of curriculum and instruction to limited or no knowledge of curriculum and instruction.</p> <p>4.A. Where are you on that continuum?</p> <p>4.B. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being high knowledge and 10 being no knowledge, in each of the three areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching/learning process • Assessment • Staff Development <p>4.C. It is important to monitor progress the division is making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you monitor progress? • Who does the monitoring for you? 	<p>1.A. Is there a clearly stated vision or clear expectations for instruction?</p> <p>1.B. What is that vision and how was it developed?</p> <p>1.C. How has your behavior as principal changed as a result of the superintendent's shared vision or expectation?</p> <p>1.D. How has the superintendent's vision impacted your school's vision for instruction?</p> <p>3. What role has the superintendent played in affecting improvement in student achievement in your building?</p>	<p>2. Evaluating instructional effectiveness</p> <p>3. Facilitating instruction through budget</p> <p>4. Planning for instruction</p> <p>5. Supervising instruction</p> <p>6. Monitoring instructional program</p> <p>8. Developing instructional policies</p> <p>9. Reviewing research</p> <p>11. Facilitating staff development</p>
Conceptual Framework 4: Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of insuring improved student achievement.		
Superintendent	Principal	SILS
<p>6.A. How have you dealt with the pressures relating to change?</p> <p>6.B. How did you address change with the staff?</p>	<p>1.A. Is there a clearly stated vision or clear expectations for instruction?</p> <p>1.B. What is that vision and how was it developed?</p> <p>1.C. How has your behavior as principal changed as a result of the superintendent's shared vision or expectation?</p> <p>1.D. How has the superintendent's vision impacted your school's vision for instruction?</p> <p>3. What role has the superintendent played in affecting improvement in student achievement in your building?</p>	<p>4. Planning for instruction</p> <p>6. Monitoring instructional program</p>

Conceptual Framework 5: All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.		
Superintendent	Principal	SILS
<p>We are in an era of educational reform in Virginia. Reflect on this division prior to 1995 and the SOL revisions and new accountability standards, and since 1995.</p> <p>5.A. What was the community's perception of the division and its expectations?</p> <p>5.B. Have there been organizational or staffing changes since 1995?</p> <p>5.C. What are the expectations of the governing body? Is there a heightened concern since 1995?</p>	<p>We are in an era of educational reform in Virginia. Reflect on this division prior to 1995 and the SOL revisions and new accountability standards, and since 1995.</p> <p>4.A. What was the community's perception of the division and its expectations?</p> <p>4.B. Have there been organization or staffing changes since 1995?</p> <p>4.C. What are the expectations of the governing body? Is there a heightened concern since 1995?</p>	<p>1. Collaboratively developing goals</p> <p>9. Reviewing research</p> <p>12. Communicating system expectations</p>

Myles and Huberman (1994) advance a qualitative data analysis scheme that focuses on data reduction into manageable categories. Carney (as cited in Myles and Huberman, 1994) presents "The Ladder of Analytical Abstraction" to delineate the three levels of data reduction. The first level is "Summarizing and packaging the data." At this level the data are summarized and goes through a first level of coding. The second level is "Repackaging and aggregating the data." The goal of this level is to "identify themes and trends in the data overall." Specifically, one is looking for relationships in the data. The final level is "Developing and testing propositions to construct an explanatory framework." The researcher at this level further reduces the data for analysis for analysis of the trends and finally synthesizes "the data into one explanatory framework" (Carney in Myles and Huberman, 1994). This researcher followed this procedure by reducing and synthesizing superintendent and principal statements. The reduced statements were not synthesized across measures, thus the reduced data were used to represent what a superintendent said or what his or her principal said about him or her. Then a judgement was made, based on a scale from 1 - 4, regarding the degree to which a statement about a superintendent, either self or principal generated, agreed with the conceptual framework.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the behaviors of the superintendent during an era of educational reform in Virginia. The salient question was in those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? Five consistent themes relative to instructional leadership and the superintendency created the conceptual framework for this study.

Those are:

1. The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.
2. Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.
3. Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.
4. Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement.
5. All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.

Particularly key in this study was language describing the behaviors of the superintendents that is congruent with language and/or behaviors identified in the conceptual framework. Following are descriptive and representative statements from the superintendents and principals gathered during the interview process. Each set of statements is presented with

the corresponding conceptual framework. (See Appendix A for specific interview questions.)

This represents the first level of data reduction.

Research Question 1: - Is the leadership style of the superintendent collaborative and inclusive of all constituents?

Conceptual Framework 1 - The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.

- Superintendent 1:** She described her leadership style as being “characterized by decisive consensus building.” She has a superintendent’s leadership team where major decisions are discussed in that setting.
- Superintendent 2:** He described his leadership style as being that of a “collaborator.” “I don’t have all of the answers. I need information and input from a lot of people. I am a collaborator.”
- Superintendent 3:** “Extremely collaborative, but very much involved, at some level controlling.”
- Superintendent 4:** “I’m a superintendent that trusts. I put a lot of trust in people who work for me. I sit down and have frank discussions about what we do. We put everything out on the table and basically come to consensus.”
- Superintendent 5:** She described her leadership as being “participatory and collaborative. I use teams for different reasons, issues and initiatives. I include teachers, administrators and the community, where needed.”
- Superintendent 6:** “Well, my overall leadership style is participatory decision-making. I try very hard not to be a top down leader/manager. Principals and staff give input and have ownership in the decisions that are made.”
- Superintendent 7:** “I describe my leadership as democratic/autocratic. I like the democratic process, but when the democratic process reaches an impasse someone has to get things moving.”
- Superintendent 8:** “We have very competent central office administrators and principals. I work in concert with them to set direction and vision. I believe in the Hersey-Blanchard Theory of Leadership. I support those who are doing the job effectively.”

- Principal 2-1:** “Principals have monthly staff meetings to discuss the needs of students and weaknesses and what we want to accomplish. Our superintendent is pretty involved. He comes into the schools on a pretty consistent basis. He has been clear with things they should implement or accomplish.”
- Principal 3-1:** “I think that our superintendent is more of a gatherer of information for shared decision making rather than a dictator. Strategic planning teams address most issues - bottom up, not top down. However, there are some things that are mandated and the superintendent has to take action or make a decision. There is an opportunity for all employees and others to be stakeholders.”
- Principal 4-1:** “Our superintendent is a very excellent leader, born and raised in [county]. He understands the needs of children and community. He is always open for suggestions. He has the heart of the children at the forefront. He takes ownership. It’s not just a job.”
- Principal 5-1:** “She is hands on with instructional leadership and very accessible. There are excellent people under her who are helpful. There is a team meeting every Monday. There are regular instructional meetings. She puts instruction as a priority for the role.”
- Principal 5-2:** “She has a very hands on approach to leadership. She is very open and you can talk freely to her.”
- Principal 6-1:** “A very detailed person who wants to make sure that everything runs effectively. At times he has to be authoritarian - the buck stops here. He tries to involve individuals in the decisions that will affect them. We had gone through TQM training years ago.”
- Principal 6-2:** “He’s kind of a quiet leader who sits down and talks with us about expectations and what we need to do to get to our goals. Then he lets us go off - sort of site-based management. He trusts our judgement. We have been together a long time as an administrative team.
- Principal 7-1:** “This superintendent has a hands-on type of leadership. He has a good grasp of activities that are going on. He is easy to contact. He doesn’t lead in a dictatorial manner. You are able to sit down to discuss issues and work on solutions with him. Positional power is used effectively in this small division.”

Superintendents and principals of both improving and non-improving divisions reported the

presence of collaborative leadership behaviors. There was no difference between the two groups of superintendents.

Research Question 2 - Has the superintendent articulated a vision formulated through a collaborative process?

Conceptual Framework 2 - Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.

Superintendent 1: “Improved student achievement. The school board’s expectations were very clear.”

Superintendent 2: “I hope the school division gets to the point to have more programs to involve students at an earlier age. I would like to see the 4-year-old program open to every child to start them earlier.” This vision came from “living in the county for 56 years. I have seen education and the county’s needs change over time.”

Superintendent 3: “We are involved in the kind of systemic change like nothing else in Virginia. All students have to achieve. Our goal is to provide life long learners. I brought it (vision) with me. I had been a change agent in five divisions. I led the process of developing the vision with a facilitator paid by a DOE grant.”

Superintendent 4: “My vision is that we are going to do everything that we possibly can do to help every single child that we have. Whatever we need to give them in technology, resources, whatever, they deserve it and I’m going to see that they get it.” This vision comes from “personal experience. I’m a product of [this] county. I grew up here and that kind of thinking has not always been the standard. My personal vision is to try to turn everything around. The kids deserve the best.”

Superintendent 5: “My vision is to be fully accredited by 2007.” This vision was “pretty much imposed. We developed a mission statement years ago in a participatory activity that included teachers, administrators and the school board. The new SOA fit right in where we wanted to be.”

Superintendent 6: “The school division will provide educational and career related opportunities for children PK-12 to prepare them to be successful as workers and in post secondary opportunities.” This vision comes from

“what I see as a need for a school division to be doing for children. Decisions are based on what’s best for children. The strategic plan is used.”

Superintendent 7: “My vision is essentially to create an organization that is self motivated and strives to achieve excellence on all levels.” This vision was “developed over a number of years of leadership. A good organization must sustain itself. As superintendent you cannot micro-manage and do everything. With good leadership and vision the organization will perpetuate the excellence.”

Superintendent 8: “To be the best small division in the state in everything we try to do. It is important to create a community concept. This vision has come from working in the field of leadership the last 25 years and working with [this county]. I think schools are a huge part of the community.”

Principal 2-1: “Yes, there is a vision. Every child to pass SOL. We are concerned about the 30% who don’t pass the SOLs. Principals have monthly staff meetings to discuss the needs of students and weaknesses and what we want to accomplish.”

Principal 3-1: “You’d better believe it (clearly stated vision)! Vision 2000 is what it is called now. A strategic planning team develops it. The team is made up of administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and parents. They set forth the goals and objectives for the division. Schools incorporate these into their plans.”

Principal 4-1: “Yes, the vision is to make sure that all children are equipped physically and mentally to cope in society after high school. Each of the schools has the same vision. The superintendent has a vision and shares with everyone and each school developed a comparable vision that goes hand in hand with the superintendent. Be the best you can be.”

Principal 5-1: “Yes there is a vision. I guess about 5 or 6 years ago a consulting firm came in for 3 days and listened to us and a vision statement was developed that included the thoughts of all of us. Basically, the bottom line, we will give full attention to meeting the needs of every child to prepare them for the 21st century. The best part was not what was written down, but how we went about developing the vision! It was very much a team building, consensus building, participatory, very creative process. School board members, principals and all of central office were present, including secretaries.”

- Principal 5-2:** “Yes, there is both a mission and a vision in the division. The vision was developed by a combination of parents, students, administrators, school board. It was a collaborative process.”
- Principal 6-1:** “Yes, the vision and mission statements for the county and each school was developed through committees. The SOL was a big motivator for the vision. Basically, encourage students to reach full potential in all aspects of life - academic, social, building character.”
- Principal 6-2:** “Yes there is a vision. There is an expectation that the curriculum will be aligned to meet SOL. All children can learn and we will help them. There are very high expectations that all will achieve. We will meet every child’s needs. I don’t know how it (vision) came about.”
- Principal 7-1:** “There is a vision statement. I think sometimes the vision implementation is left to the individual schools. I heard that it was developed with the school board members.”

Every superintendent of both improving and non-improving divisions reported the existence of a vision which had been articulated to constituents. Principals corroborated superintendent self reports. Visions were not always developed through a collaborative process. Only three superintendents described the vision as a result of a collaborative or strategic activity, while principals of four divisions (one improving and three non-improving) said the vision was developed through a collaborative process.

Research Question 3 - Does the superintendent have an understanding of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement?

Conceptual Framework 3 - Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.

Superintendent 1: “ I have high knowledge” of curriculum and instruction. “I have a background in learning pathology. I utilize state data and report cards. I am adept at being able to spin that information. I am looking for evidence

of improvement. We set goals for all areas - SAT9 and SOL scores. Then we measured ourselves against the goals. We must always have progress and forward momentum. Success breeds success. Once the students started achieving the teachers realized they could teach." In monitoring progress "I say to the teachers: If you were going to be convicted of teaching the SOL, what evidence would they have to use against you?"

Superintendent 2: "I am at the high end of knowledge. I have been a director of instruction and a high school principal. I monitor progress with lots and lots of data. We have become more scientific about data now in education and breaking data down and using research. The 7th grade math teachers are crunching numbers to see where students should be when they get to them. Teachers are thinking differently regarding using data. As superintendent, I guide the monitoring - what they are looking for; data queries. We are becoming more scientific in how we look at student progress. Everybody's monitoring."

Superintendent 3: "High knowledge. I have the ability to take seemingly disparate things and link them. I am not good at any one single thing. I am good at inspiring people to do what they know most. I read every evaluation done by every administrator to learn what teachers and staff are doing and how principals are leading. At staff development, I watch others learning."

Superintendent 4: "I am somewhere in the middle. I'm not the strongest person when it comes to instruction, but I have a good knowledge of it. I was a building principal for 16 years; superintendent for 10 years. I may not be the sharpest pencil in the box, but I have a good working knowledge of curriculum and instruction. We do it (monitor) weekly, at the end of the semesters and end of each year. I bring staff in weekly to discuss what's going on in schools and discuss where they are and what they need."

Superintendent 5: "I have a fairly strong knowledge of curriculum and instruction. I spent 15 years as a teacher. I was also a principal and director of student services. I take test data and disaggregate it. I monitor by walking around in buildings and meeting with people responsible for curriculum and monitoring."

Superintendent 6: "I have high knowledge. I'm a teacher first. Whenever I have the opportunity to go into a class to teach, I do, so that I can show teachers that I'm not asking them to do things I don't understand. I model for teachers. I review scores - standardized tests, SOL, SOL progress scores. At the end of each marking period I receive grades of each student. I ask students what they are learning. I'm checking to see if they know what they're

supposed to be learning.”

Superintendent 7: “I am moderately high in knowledge of curriculum and instruction. Knowledge does not transform itself into leadership. I monitor progress by evaluating outcomes of what we attempt to do - SOL data and any hard data that we can get that gives us information.”

Superintendent 8: “I’m probably ahead of many; certainly not an expert in all areas - midway or better. How you monitor progress depends on what you’re looking at. Every principal has an annual test improvement plan that’s very focused now on SOL. We analyze where the school has needs and what needs to be shored up in curriculum and where weaknesses are in the delivery of instruction.”

Principal 2-1: “My behavior has changed somewhat. I am monitoring instruction with observations. I get progress reports from teachers. I’m making sure curriculum alignment is where it should be. The superintendent is supporting what is needed in the building.”

Principal 3-1: “I am able to adjust plans at the school level since we know where we’re heading and why. The superintendent is keeping us involved and sharing information. We used her objectives and vision that have come down to write our biennial plans. We set benchmarks for achievement in the strategic plan. Principals are required by the superintendent to provide her with a school report stating goals and objectives, what was achieved, as well as goals for next year. She reads and reviews these and discusses with principals to provide input and changes. We must have an improvement plan to go along with that annual report.”

Principal 4-1: “He has made it very clear that if we need any materials, need to attend any workshop or inservice, he wants us to have it. He tells us to keep him abreast of what’s happening and the needs of children. He has an open-door policy. We can talk to him at any time about the needs. He listens and rarely says no to anything. He knows how important education is for the children.”

Principal 5-1: “The superintendent has asked principals to spend at least 1-1/2 hours daily in classrooms in order to maintain a focus on instruction and not be detracted by the other things that demand the principal’s attention. There is excellent leadership from the superintendent based on the knowledge base. She sees that we have what we need in materials. She networks with the General Assembly. Curriculum guides are up to speed. There is an emphasis on being the best we can be.”

Principal 5-2: “The superintendent’s vision has brought focus to what we are doing in the schools. There has been lots of emphasis to rewriting and defining curriculum - bringing in alignment with state SOL. The superintendent is bringing some commonality among the buildings. We are all using the same scope and sequence. Countywide assessments are used to make sure that pacing is similar. The superintendent is very much attuned to instructional issues and sharing the latest research.”

Principal 6-1: “Through the evaluation process, we are constantly looking at data to see if we’re making improvements. The superintendent is supportive of individual school programs such as after school programs. We have not encountered roadblocks. He (superintendent) is always sharing ideas from schools that he receives; ideas and suggestions that have worked in other school divisions. He is not saying that you have to do what he sends, but see if it has value for your school.”

Principal 6-2: “We have a regular meeting with him as a leadership team. He makes sure we are clear on issues - DOE matters, current trends. He shares that information with us so that we have it available when making decisions. He also makes sure that we have the data we need to make decisions.”

Principal 7-1: “I think (superintendent) will be remembered for establishing the physical environment for effective learning. Buildings have been improved so that students don’t have to worry about the conditions of the building. They can focus on learning.”

Superintendents of both improving and non-improving divisions stated that they had strong knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement. All but one principal validated superintendent self reports of their knowledge of curriculum and instruction. That superintendent and principal were part of the non-improving group.

Research Question 4 - How does the superintendent employ change processes to impact improved student achievement?

Conceptual Framework 4 - Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of insuring improved student achievement.

- Superintendent 1:** “You are either moving forward or moving backward. There is no standing still. It is important that the leader embrace change and try not to stay static. The leader must model that. Change is not a negative; it is a chance to move forward; something different. Just keep talking about it. People get comfortable. You have to be upfront with it (change). If you are comfortable, you will have a difficult time working with me. It is not change just for the sake of change but change to meet a goal.”
- Superintendent 2:** “We have received a lot of criticism that we are pushing kids too hard, too early. My message to parents has been let’s just try to work together. In the end the children will benefit. I preach to the administrators and staff in every meeting that what we are doing will benefit the children in the long run. We can do it for the children. We are going to make every child successful. That’s why we are here.”
- Superintendent 3:** “I learned a valuable lesson from my cat when we moved here from New York. Forcing change was more frightening than change itself. It was very frightening for staff to address reform issues. Change has to deal with the redistribution of power. People don’t mind change, but they don’t like to relinquish power. You must be able to work through change issues in a safe environment where you can have a chance to fail and succeed. The previous superintendent had an authoritarian style. The budget was the process used to punish or reward. If you didn’t make waves you were rewarded. Wave makers indicate people are thinking. I am a collaborator and I want input from everyone.”
- Superintendent 4:** “I have had lots of resistance. We have had lots of resistance. We have had to meet with people in large and small group sessions; in departmental meetings. I have said that these are not things that go away. Let’s stop griping and see if you can work together to make the changes. It made us have to do some things that we might not have done before. We are paying attention to instruction, financing and other areas more closely such as staff development and use of resources.”
- Superintendent 5:** “I have bombarded people with information. We have done town meetings all over the county explaining SOL, assessment programs, teacher shortage. We have mounted information campaigns talking about the required standards. My message has been that we have standards. We are going to be assessed. We are going to do it! I have also expanded staff to help others [principals and teachers] focus on specific issues associated with the changes.
- Superintendent 6:** “I have made a number of staffing changes. I say we have the SOL tests;

we know what we need to do. We have until 2007 to make changes. We will continue to make incremental progress. Being accredited now doesn't matter - 2007 does. By 2007 we will show what we're doing. I don't put undue pressure on them (staff) at this point. Teachers and principals are stressed. People are human and can only handle so much. We're trying to avoid destructive stress."

Superintendent 7: "Whenever Richmond makes a change they can do it in a day or two. But for schools it takes longer - 1-2 years. Curriculum and instruction changes don't occur overnight; they occur over time. I make sure that the third, fifth, eighth and end-of-course teachers know that they are not on the line individually. The third grade teacher is accountable for what they were responsible to cover, etc. I am trying to show that everyone has a role and a responsibility."

Superintendent 8: "First, I tried not to fight it. Some divisions felt that SOL, SOA and SOQ changes were temporary and didn't embrace them. We're living in an era of reform. We must embrace change, not fight it. We can get people to say we can do this, even if we don't agree with it. I try to set a positive tone, not a negative tone, even if there is stress. We are doing the best job we can for kids. When change occurs, celebrate the change. I'm always keeping it before the school board, teacher groups. I let them know where we are and what we are doing. I am taking people who have embraced change and moving them into mentoring positions."

Principal 2-1: "There have been some changes since the SOL. All teachers across grade levels are working across grade levels in SOL. Technology has increased by adding more programs to labs correlated to SOL. We also added AR (Accelerated Reader) to work on reading."

Principal 3-1: "I have served under two different superintendents; under current superintendent as principal. She shares more information. We are able to make changes as needed, understand better and able to answer questions that parents and community have about education. Oh yes, there have been staffing changes. Since '95 we have lost 3-4 teaching positions at my school. The division has lost 27 programs due to funding cuts by the Board of Supervisors, including some athletics such as golf and soccer. In central office, other people have picked up additional responsibilities when people left and weren't replaced."

Principal 4-1: "There has been re-organization in terms of instructional programs. The superintendent is very involved in inservice to look at what all are doing at the building and how we are teaching. The Director of Instruction has

done more to help principals and schools help students.”

Principal 5-1: “The superintendent’s approach has built a good leadership team with the principals. Principals meet two times a month. The superintendent stays up to date in terms of research at the state and national level. She is always on top of what’s happening and that gets passed on to us. I now have a reading facilitator that oversees the reading program to take that responsibility off the principal. That person also acts as an assistant to the principal, when needed.”

Principal 5-2: “We have gone from little support at central office to fully staffed at central office. They have added an assistant superintendent for instruction and elementary and secondary curriculum specialists. I am losing my assistant principal next year due to a re-focus of priorities. There is a need for more emphasis at the middle school.”

Principal 6-1: “There have been organizational changes since ‘95. The assistant superintendent for instruction and personnel position has been reinstated. There was some other restructuring at central office. We gained a technology coordinator for the county and one additional reading specialist. An ISS (in-school suspension) aide was added to get children to change behavior which enhances student achievement. The accountability piece has caused people to be more concerned about consistency across grade levels. Grade levels are doing more talking to each other; more sharing of ideas. The K, 1, and 2 teachers are feeling accountable even though there’s no state test at those grades.”

Principal 6-2: “Yes we have added positions. They hired reading specialists for grades 4-8. Also hired two transition teachers to work with students not needing to be retained but not ready for the next grade. At central office, the Director of Instruction had many hats. Now some responsibilities have been shifted to others.

Principal 7-1: “There have not been a lot of changes. The work falls to a few people - superintendent, assistant superintendent and director of special programs. There are no curriculum coordinators - i.e., science, etc. I have to be able to address those areas.”

Superintendents of both improving and non-improving divisions reported that change was a reality that had to be dealt with and not avoided. Superintendents felt they had to model embracing change in order to bring all on board to address change for improved student

achievement. Principals substantiated the impact that superintendents' leadership for change had on their behaviors and schools. There was no difference noted between improving and non-improving divisions.

Research Question 5 - Is the superintendent's leadership influenced by historical, community and organizational contexts?

Conceptual Framework 5 - All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.

Superintendent 1: "I came to [county] in 1996. There was poor student achievement; historically poor performance and an attitude that the kids can't do this. There was good financial support for education. The school board had lots of vision. All of the ingredients were there to make an outstanding school division. Prior to SOL the attitude [of the local governing body] was that the schools aren't any good. Business leaders said why do you want to go there? People were encouraged to move to [county]. Real estate has gone up since the SOL. Schools are no longer seen as a barrier to economic growth since SOL improvement."

Superintendent 2: "Before '95 the expectations were that students going out of high school could do well in a chosen field. Preparation for students in high school was the focus. Since '95 there is a closer look at the students all along the way - parent and community perception. Parents were scared to death of SOL. More is expected of children. We have added consequences and expectations for students, teachers, parents along with board policy saying you will participate in remediation. For a rural county, students do very well compared with students from different demographics and even more affluent communities. The board likes the idea that all children can learn and that all teachers can move students forward. The Board of Supervisors are limited in funding they can provide, yet they are pleased with what they are seeing."

Superintendent 3: "From 1989 -1995 we were working on Project VISION reform efforts - closing old schools, moving towards integration. I did it with a collaborative process - 200 people and 20 committees. The community has always taken a great deal of pride in the schools, but they weren't aware of the problems. There is still a segment of the population that is concerned about education because it will impact them economically and

take away a cheap labor source. Locally, some are still angry about the changes that are occurring. These people are now trying to influence the school board by trying to influence appointments to the school board.”

Superintendent 4: “Prior to ‘95 the community’s expectations were not very good. Since ‘95 changes have resulted in getting some badly needed help to do some things we needed to have and do. Before ‘95 it was tough/difficult to get needed support for the schools. With mandates we have gotten more attention. If it’s not mandated they want to know if it can be cut from the budget. Since ‘95 we have been able to get them to support the needs better. They don’t want to take the blame for things that don’t go well.”

Superintendent 5: “Before ‘95 people said they wanted good schools but they didn’t know what that meant. Teachers taught from the textbook. Curriculum was what was between the covers. I would not want to go back where we were. We set standards, developed a curriculum and expectations for meeting standards. We are doing things we have always talked about doing but didn’t realize them. The county raised taxes last year to give teachers a raise. We came out publicly with a lot of data about teachers, turnover, salaries being lower than surrounding areas. I’m not sure if standards or the strategic information campaign made this difference, but something did.”

Superintendent 6: “Prior to 1995, the feeling within the community was yes we do have high expectations of children in [county]. There was some ‘mission creep’ coming into the division that detracted from the instructional focus. After ‘95 the community’s awareness was heightened and data was showing the numbers of children not passing SOL would keep [county] from being fully accredited. There are doctors, lawyers and investment brokers whose children are returning to the public schools. The community is more attuned to the instructional side and sees the need and understands what has to be done.”

Superintendent 7: “Prior to ‘95 we were operating under the LPT. We had actually risen to sixth best in the state with LPT. With the change to SOL, it was contrary to everything I know about making change. We were tested prior to cut scores being set and before we know what we were going to be tested on. Confidence eroded when the shift occurred. No one understood what the changes were and what was expected. Initially there was great concern because we weren’t being successful. Presently I’m not hearing much discussion about SOL and division performance since that is improving.”

Superintendent 8: “Prior to ‘95 schools were perceived as improving but kind of middle of

the road. We were competing for resources with other agencies. The emphasis was on the non-academic side - athletics. Since '95 the schools are seen as supportive of other county agencies - Sheriff's Department and IDA. The two boards are working better together. It is now viewed that if the county is going to move out in the forefront in the state then all facets of education must improve. Schools must be an integral part of that. There have been joint retreats with both boards. The IDA sees schools as being valuable to economic and community development."

Principal 2-1:

"Overall good perception. The community looked at us very favorably. We had made improvement prior to '95. Focus of the SOL has helped demonstrate what we are accomplishing. We are more in the limelight than we used to be because of SOL. Communication about what we are doing seems to be helping with parental support. I'm not real sure what the expectations of the governing body are. We invite them into the school several times a year to see the schools and share programs. I think they are impressed and amazed about what they are seeing going on."

Principal 3-1:

"Prior to '95 our community did not appreciate or understand our business of education. In '93 we combined 5 facilities into 3 new ones. We were frowned upon. The buildings were 81 years old and had no infrastructure for technology. The superintendent has made every effort to inform the public - in homes, at teas - they are sometimes receptive and sometimes not. Since '95 we have moved into the top range for computer technology. The emphasis on SOL has made the community more aware of what's going on and how expensive education can be. The Board of Supervisors is not very pro education. It has been difficult to get a budget passed in the past three years. They feel schools are a drain on economics for the community. On paper their composite index is rising which means fewer state dollars. They feel there is a greater burden as a result of SOL. We operate basically a lot on the 37 grants we've written and had funded. We're a grant writing machine."

Principal 4-1:

"The community always felt education was very important but now they are very serious about what children must learn. The role of tests is different now than when parents came through school. Parents are understanding what the changes mean. It forces parents to be involved with the schools. The Board of Supervisors has always been concerned with teachers being professional and the quality of teachers. Everyone has to tighten up and work hard. They want to see good results for their support."

Principal 5-1:

"I'm not aware of any lack of interest in schools. However, the SOL have

brought focus to everything including parent involvement and student achievement. We're not making excuses that we're a rural county and can't do what others do. There is great interest in what's happening academically and a way to measure our progress. The Board of Supervisors was supportive in a nice raise last year. They have been supportive in the CIP and educator's salaries."

Principal 5-2:

"I think the community had a good perception of the schools. State SOL have caused more to focus on academics. We have gone from an appointed school board to an elected board. There has not been a major or radical change since appointed school board members were elected. There is greater communication between the two boards. We have received major support for CIP for buildings and staffing schools. The pupil teacher ratio is better now than it has ever been."

Principal 6-1:

"I think the community has been supportive throughout. I don't know that things have changed that much in schools. I think the accountability piece with SOL has caused some to get overly concerned. We are seeing progress every year, so the community is supportive. Some understand that test scores aren't the only measure of our progress. I'm not sure financial support has changed drastically. There has been increased support for technology. We won't ever get all of what we need."

Principal 6-2:

"The community's perception was not very good, I don't think. I came to the division in '94. The perception was that the public schools were pretty much worthless - not preparing students for the world. I don't feel that was what was happening. Progress was being made as seen through the LPT. Our current superintendent is a high-stepper, go getter, risk taker. He asks us what do we need to do to get to our goals. We don't want gimmicks that won't last. Since '95 it is not as negative as it used to be but still not pro-education. There are issues such as those in central administration make more money than some in the governing body. I'm not sure of the source of this. I'm not sure if they want to admit that good things are going on in the schools."

Principal 7-1:

"I can't give a lot prior to '95. However, I have observed that few individuals have achieved beyond high school in the community. My first year here out of 50 graduates, only 5 went to college. Now up to 85% are attending college. The SOL have made it more public about student achievement. Before SOLs you didn't know what to look for. There is increased awareness. They serve as a lever to get parent involved in the educational setting. The school board has just changed to totally elected."

Superintendents of both improving and non-improving divisions expressed that historical, community and organizational contexts directly influence their leadership decisions.

Implementation of the Revised Standards of Learning (SOL) in 1995, along with the revised Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA), has impacted the way superintendents conduct business during an era of increased accountability.

Overall, the responses from superintendents, as supported by responses from principals, reveal a very strong alignment between practicing superintendent leadership behaviors (in both improving and non-improving divisions) and the conceptual framework developed for this study. Superintendents of both improving and non-improving divisions reported that they are collaborative leaders with a strong knowledge of curriculum and instruction that allows them to determine educational needs for educational improvement. Notably, the principals from Superintendent 7's division did not support the superintendent's self report of strong instructional leadership behaviors. All superintendents communicated a vision, though only three superintendents mentioned that the vision was developed through a collaborative process. It is interesting to note that principals in four divisions (one improving and three non-improving) reported that the vision evolved as the result of a collaborative process. Change is a reality for the participating superintendents in both groups and the need to effectively manage change was perceived as important for improved student achievement. The influence of historical, community and organizational contexts was strongly outlined by all superintendents in improving and non-improving divisions.

The following tables show the relationship between superintendent and principal responses and the conceptual framework. These matrices represent an additional reduction in the

data. Data analyses are included two sections: Responses that Relate to the Conceptual Framework and Responses that are Outside of the Conceptual Framework.

Table 4: CF 1: The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.

RESPONSES RELATE TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK		RESPONSES ARE OUTSIDE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
Superintendent	Principal	Superintendent	Principal
S1 - decisive consensus building; discuss major decisions with superintendent's leadership team	0		
S2 - collaborator; need information and input from a lot of people	P2-1 - pretty involved; monthly staff meetings to discuss needs of students and what we want to accomplish		P2-1 - direction clear from superintendent
S3 - extremely collaborative; very much involved	P3-1 - shared decision making rather than a dictator; strategic planning teams address most issues; bottom up, not top down; opportunity for all employees and others to be stakeholders	S3-very much involved; somewhat controlling	
S4 - reach consensus by putting everything on the table; trust the people who work for me	P4-1 - open for suggestions; understands the needs of children and community		
S5 - participatory and collaborative; utilize teams for different reasons, issues and initiatives; includes teachers, administrators and community, where needed	P5-1 - excellent people who are helpful; regular team meetings P5-2 - very open and you can talk freely		
S6 - participatory decision making; try hard not to be a top down leader/manager; principals and staff give input and have ownership in the decisions	P6-1 - tries to involve individuals in decisions; TQM training P6-2-seeks input about meeting goals; trusts our judgement		P6-1 - at times authoritarian; the buck stops here; want to make sure everything runs effectively
S7 - democratic/autocratic; like the democratic process; cannot micromanage and do everything	P7-1 - sits down to discuss issues and work on solutions; doesn't lead in a dictatorial manner	S7-democratic/autocratic; someone has to get things moving when the democratic process reaches an impasse	
S8 - work in concert with central office administrators and principals to set direction and vision; support those who are doing the job effectively	**		

0 There were no principals who met the criteria for participation.

**Unable to coordinate the principal's participation in study.

Table 5: CF 2: Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.

RESPONSES RELATE TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK		RESPONSES ARE OUTSIDE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
Superintendent	Principal	Superintendent	Principal
S1 - improved student achievement	0	S1 - school board's expectations were clear	
S2 - expand preschool programs; have more programs to involve students at an earlier age	P2-1 - vision exists; every child to pass SOL	S2 - came from living in the county	
S3 - provide life long learners; all students have to achieve; led the process of developing the vision with a facilitator	P3-1 - vision exists - developed by strategic planning team of administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and parents		
S4 - help every single child; try to turn everything around; kids deserve the best	P4-1 - vision exists to make sure all children are equipped physically and mentally to cope in society after high school; each school has the same vision	S4 - vision comes from personal experience; product of the county	P4-1-collaboration not mentioned in vision development
S5 - to be fully accredited by 2007; developed a mission statement in a participatory activity that included teachers, administrators and school board	P5-1 - vision exists - included the thoughts of all of us; best part was not what was written down but how the vision was developed - team building, consensus building, participatory, very creative process P5-2 - vision exists - developed by a combination of people- parents, students, administrators, school board, collaborative process	S5 - pretty much imposed	
S6 - prepare students to be successful; decisions are based on what's best for children; use strategic plan	P6-1 - vision exists - developed through committees P6-2 - clear vision exists; expectation that the curriculum will be aligned to meet SOL.	S6 - what I see as a need for the division to be doing for children	P6-2-unsure of how vision came about
S7 - achieve excellence on all levels; organization will perpetuate excellence with good leadership and vision	P7-1-vision exists; implementation left to schools - developed with school board members	S7 - developed over a number of years of leadership; a good organization must sustain itself	P7-1-not a big fan of vision and mission statements; prefers autonomy to design and implement vision
S8 - be the best small division in the state; create a community concept	**	S8 - comes from working in the field of leadership and with the county	

0 There were no principals who met the criteria for participation.

**Unable to coordinate the principal's participation in study.

From an analysis of Table 4, which addresses Conceptual Framework 1, it is apparent that all superintendents describe their leadership style as being collaborative, participatory or consensus building. Two superintendents also referenced the need to be “somewhat controlling” or “autocratic” despite exercising in general a collaborative leadership style. Similarly, principals supported the leadership style descriptions asserted by the superintendents. Both the interview and SILS protocols document this agreement. One principal reported that even though the superintendent involved staff in discussions of student needs, it was evident that the superintendent provided clear direction for the staff. Another principal referred to the superintendent as “trying to involve individuals in decisions,” however there are times when the superintendent was “authoritarian.”

Table 5 focuses on Conceptual Framework 2 (Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents). Each superintendent and principal definitively stated that there was a clear vision for educational improvement in their respective school divisions. Only one superintendent indicated that the vision was drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents. Five principals representing four divisions stated that the vision was developed through a collaborative process that included the thoughts of different groups of people. One principal failed to mention collaboration as part of the vision development. Another principal was unsure of how the vision was developed. One principal indicated she was not a fan of vision and mission statements. Five superintendents expressed that the vision was the result of working in the field of leadership for a number of years, while personal experience, including having lived in the county for many years or being a native of the county was cited by two superintendents. Two

superintendents saw the vision as being imposed by forces outside the school division or driven by school board expectations.

Table 6: CF 3: Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.

RESPONSES RELATE TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK		RESPONSES ARE OUTSIDE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
Superintendent	Principal	Superintendent	Principal
S1 - high knowledge; background in learning pathology	0		
S2 - high end of knowledge; have been a director of instruction and a principal	P2-1 - supports what is needed in the building; making sure curriculum alignment is where it should be		
S3 - high knowledge; have the ability to take seemingly disparate things and link them	P3-1 - keeps us involved and shares information; I'm able to adjust plans at the school level since we know where we're heading and why		
S4 - somewhere in the middle; was a building principal for 16 years	P4-1 - supports what is needed; tells us to keep him abreast of what's happening and the needs of the children		
S5 - fairly strong knowledge; building principal and director of student services; spent 15 years as a teacher	P5-1 - excellent leadership based on knowledge; superintendent asked principals to spend at least 1.5 hours daily in classrooms in order to maintain a focus on instruction P5-2 - very attuned to instructional issues; superintendent's vision has brought focus to what we are doing in the schools		
S6 - high knowledge; I'm a teacher first.; not asking them to do things I don't understand	P6-1 - shares ideas and suggestions; we're constantly looking at data to see if we're making improvements P6-2 - shares information with us for decision making; makes sure that we have the data we need to make decisions		
S7 - moderately high in knowledge; knowledge does not transfer itself into leadership			P7-1-established the physical environment for effective learning through a building plan; students don't have to worry about the conditions of the building; they can focus on learning

S8 - midway or better; probably ahead of many; analyze where the school has needs	**	
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0 There were no principals who met the criteria for participation.

**Unable to coordinate the principal's participation in study.

Table 7: CF 4: Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement.

RESPONSES RELATE TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK		RESPONSES ARE OUTSIDE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
Superintendent	Principal	Superintendent	Principal
S1*** - embrace change and try not to stay static; the leader must model that; change is not a negative	0		
S2 - do it for the children; let's try to work together; in the end the children will benefit	P2-1 - changes implemented; all teachers are working across grade levels in SOL.		
S3** - work through change; I had been a change agent in five divisions; facing change is more frightening than change itself; must be able to work through change issues in a safe environment where you can have a chance to fail and succeed	P3-1 - changes implemented; we are able to make changes as needed, understand better and able to answer questions about education; staffing changes have been made also		
S4 - let's work together to make the changes; these are not things that go away; doing some things that we might not have done before	P4-1 - changes implemented; there has been re-organization in terms of programs; superintendent is very involved in looking at what all are doing at the building and how we are teaching		
S5** - we are going to do it; we have standards; we are going to be assessed; expanded staff to help others focus on the changes	P5-1 - changes implemented; superintendent's approach has built a good leadership team P5-2 - changes implemented; we have gone from little support at central office to fully staffed at central office		
S6** - we know what we need to do; don't put undue pressure on the staff; trying to avoid destructive stress; we will continue to make incremental progress	P6-1 - changes implemented; the accountability piece has caused people to be more concerned about consistency across grade levels P6-2 - changes implemented; we have added positions; some responsibilities have been shifted to others		

S7 - everyone has a role and a responsibility; curriculum and instruction changes don't occur overnight; they occur over time	P7-1 - some changes implemented	
SG*** - embrace change; try not to fight it; set a positive tone, not a negative tone; celebrate change when it occurs; moving people who have embraced change into mentoring positions	**	

0 There were no principals who met the criteria for participation.

**Unable to coordinate the principal's participation in study.

***Also had organizational changes

Conceptual framework 3 (Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.) was addressed in Table 6. All eight superintendents indicated they had a moderate to high knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to address educational improvement. Seven of the eight principals concurred with the superintendents' assertion of strong knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction. The one principal who did not agree felt that the superintendent worked most effectively at creating a physical environment for learning through a strong building plan. A strong understanding of curriculum and instruction for educational improvement by the superintendent was not cited in this case.

Conceptual framework 4 (Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement.) was analyzed in Table 7. Every superintendent reported they were able to implement and monitor change processes, especially during the era of reform in Virginia, to ensure improved student achievement. All principals corroborated the superintendents' ability to address and handle change during this

major reform movement and increased accountability for student achievement.

Table 8: CF 5: All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.

RESPONSES RELATE TO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK		RESPONSES ARE OUTSIDE OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	
Superintendent	Principal	Superintendent	Principal
S1 - an attitude that kids can't achieve; historically poor performance; lots of vision; good financial support; ingredients were there to make an outstanding school division; school board's expectations were clear	0		
S2 - have added consequences and expectations for students, teachers, parents; moved from preparation of students in high school to a closer look at students all along the way	P2-1 - we're more in the limelight than we used to be because of SOL; not real sure what the expectations of the governing body are; think they are impressed and amazed about what they see going on		
S3 - community has always taken a great deal of pride in schools; they weren't aware of the problems; people are trying to influence the school board by trying to influence appointments to the school board	P3-1 - prior to '95 community did not appreciate or understand our business of education; superintendent has made every effort to inform the public; sometimes receptive, sometimes not; Board of Supervisors is not pro education; feel schools are a drain on economics for the community; we operate a lot on the 37 grants we've written and had funded		
S4 - with mandates we have gotten more attention; community's expectations have changed	P4-1 - community always felt education was important; now they are serious about what children must learn; Board of Supervisors want to see good results for their support		
S5 - people said they wanted good schools; didn't know what that meant; we set standards, developed a curriculum and expectations or meeting standards; we are doing things we have always talked about doing but didn't realize them; county raised taxes last year to give teachers a raise	P5-1 - SOL have brought focus to everything including parental involvement and student achievement; great interest in what's happening academically and a way to measure our progress; Board of Supervisors was supportive in a nice raise last year and the CIP P5-2 - community had a good perception of the schools; SOL have caused more to focus on academics; changed from appointed school board to an elected board - no radical changes; greater communication between the two boards; received major support for CIP for buildings and staffing schools		

<p>S6 - feeling within the community was yes we do have high expectations of children; some "mission creep" coming into the division that detracted from the instructional focus; after '95 the community's awareness was heightened; community is more attuned to the instructional side and sees the need and understands what has to be done</p>	<p>P6-1 - community has been supportive throughout; accountability piece has caused some to get overly concerned; seeing progress every year so community is supportive; increased support for technology P6-2 - community's perception was not very good; schools were pretty much worthless - not preparing students for the world; since '95 not as negative as it used to be, but still not pro-education; issues that those in central administration make more money than some in the governing body; not sure they want to admit good things are going on in the schools</p>	<p>S6-community as a whole cares; Board of Supervisors attitude towards education not changed</p>
<p>S7 - change to SOL was contrary to everything I know about making change; confidence eroded when the shift occurred; initially there was great concern because we weren't being successful; presently not hearing much discussion about SOL and division performance since that is improving</p>	<p>P7-1 - few individuals have achieved beyond high school in the community; now 85% of high school graduates are attending college; SOL have made it more public about student achievement; increased awareness</p>	
<p>S8 - schools were perceived as improving, but kind of middle of the road; competing for resources with other agencies; emphasis was on the non-academic side - athletics; now schools are seen as being valuable to economic and community development</p>	<p>**</p>	

0 There were no principals who met the criteria for participation.

**Unable to coordinate the principal's participation in study.

Conceptual framework 5 (All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational) is presented in Table 8. It is clearly evident that all of the superintendents' leadership has been shaped/influenced by the various contexts in which they function. During this era of reform in Virginia, the superintendents have felt the need to address the standards and student achievement. Principals concurred with the superintendents' assessment of the contexts and the role they have had to play in order to educate and inform the community of the needs of local education.

Principals also completed the SILS (Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey).

The Superintendent as Instruction Leader Survey is based on the work of Watts (1992) and is designed to measure areas that have been defined in previous research as roles and responsibilities of superintendents when leading the district in areas of curriculum and instruction (Morgan and Peterson, 2000, pp. 7-8).

Eight principals from six of the eight participating school divisions returned the completed SILS instrument. There were no principals meeting criteria for participation in Superintendent 1's division. We were unable to coordinate the principal's participation from Superintendent 8's division.

The survey asked principals to indicate the point that was most indicative of the superintendent's involvement in the instructional program. The twelve items on the SILS were assigned to corresponding conceptual framework for analysis. Ratings were then averaged for each superintendent. Average scores of 3 to 4 are reflective of moderately high to high involvement by the superintendent in the instructional program. Likewise, average scores of 2 to 1 reflect lower involvement by the superintendent in the instructional program. Data from the SILS is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: RESULTS OF SILS INSTRUMENT

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	Related SILS Items	SUPERINTENDENT SCORES							
		S1* N=0	S2 N=1	S3 N=1	S4 N=3	S5 N=2	S6 N=2	S7 N=1	S8** N=0
1. The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.	1		4	4	4	3.5	4	3	
2. Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12		3.6	3.9	3.8	3.6	3.9	2.9	
3. Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11		3.6	3.5	3.8	3.4	3.8	2.1	
4. Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement.	4, 6		4	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.8	1.5	
5. All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.	1, 9, 12		3.7	4	3.9	3.8	4	3.5	

0 There were no principals who met the criteria for participation.

**Unable to coordinate the principal's participation in study.

An analysis of superintendent interviews, principal interviews and SILS responses was undertaken to determine congruence between superintendent self-reports of behaviors, principal reports of superintendent behaviors and SILS responses and the five areas of the conceptual framework. A judgement was made about responses, assigning a value in the range of one to four, with one indicating low agreement with the conceptual framework and four being strong agreement with the conceptual framework. Table 10 displays the values assigned to responses and indicates whether or not this researcher determined that there was congruence between the superintendent and principal responses, SILS and the conceptual framework.

The behaviors of superintendents, as corroborated by principals, are congruent with the components of the conceptual framework. Only one superintendent's behaviors were not substantiated by principal responses on two of the five areas of the conceptual framework.

Table 10: Summary of Data Analysis

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	DIVISION	SUPT (Self Report)	PRINCIPAL	SILS	AGREEMENT
1. The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.	1	4	NA	NA	Yes
	2	4	3	4	Yes
	3	3	4	4	Yes
	4	4	3	4	Yes
	5	4	3	4	Yes
	6	4	3	4	Yes
	7	3	4	3	Yes
	8	4	NA	NA	Yes
2. Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.	1	3	NA	NA	Yes
	2	3	3	4	Yes
	3	4	4	4	Yes
	4	3	3	4	Yes
	5	4	4	4	Yes
	6	3	3	4	Yes
	7	3	4	3	Yes
	8	3	NA	NA	Yes
3. Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.	1	4	NA	NA	Yes
	2	4	3	4	Yes
	3	4	4	4	Yes
	4	3	3	4	Yes
	5	4	4	3	Yes
	6	4	4	4	Yes
	7	4	1	2	No
	8	3	NA	NA	Yes
4. Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of ensuring improved student achievement.	1	4	NA	NA	Yes
	2	3	4	4	Yes
	3	4	4	4	Yes
	4	4	4	4	Yes
	5	4	4	3	Yes

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	DIVISION	SUPT (Self Report)	PRINCIPAL	SILS	AGREEMENT
	6	4	4	4	Yes
	7	4	2	2	No
	8	4	NA	NA	Yes
5. All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.	1	4	NA	NA	Yes
	2	4	3	4	Yes
	3	4	4	4	Yes
	4	4	4	4	Yes
	5	4	4	4	Yes
	6	4	4	4	Yes
	7	4	4	4	Yes
	8	4	NA	NA	Yes

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the behaviors of the superintendent during an era of educational reform in Virginia. The salient question was in those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? Five consistent themes relative to instructional leadership and the superintendency created the conceptual framework and guiding questions for this study. Those were:

1. Is the leadership style of the superintendent collaborative and inclusive of all constituents?
2. Has the superintendent articulated a vision formulated through a collaborative process?
3. Does the superintendent have an understanding of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement?
4. How does the superintendent employ change processes to impact improved student achievement?
5. Is the superintendent's leadership influenced by historical, community, and organizational contexts?

Key in this study was language describing the behaviors of the superintendents that is congruent with language and/or behaviors identified in the conceptual framework. Descriptive statements gathered during the interview process from superintendents and principals were presented in Chapter Four. The language of those interviews was subsequently analyzed in relation to the five areas of the conceptual framework.

Any discussion of the results of this study should be considered in the light of the

following limitations:

1. Only superintendents and certain principals of school divisions of 5000 pupils or less were included, therefore, generalization to larger school divisions is limited.
2. The small, purposive sample drawn from school divisions within a 150-mile radius of Hampton Roads may not be representative of other areas and this limits generalizability.
3. The methodology employed in this study may not have accurately measured superintendent behaviors.

Review of Results

Analysis of superintendent and principal responses was presented in Chapter Four. The analysis was structured to assist in answering the five guiding questions, drawn from the conceptual framework, and the overarching question: In those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? The analysis is summarized below for each of the guiding questions.

Is the leadership style of the superintendent collaborative and inclusive of all constituents? Every superintendent of both improving and non-improving divisions described their leadership style as being collaborative, participatory or consensus building, involving various constituents depending on the issue to be addressed. A couple of superintendents were quick to point out that even though their leadership style was collaborative, there are points when they have to take decisive action which results in their style becoming autocratic or controlling. Interestingly, the two superintendents who described their leadership as sometimes autocratic or controlling represented both the improving and non-improving groups. Therefore, no implications could be

gleaned from those descriptions.

The collaborative leadership style of superintendents was substantiated by the principals in the participating divisions. There was essentially no contradiction between the superintendents' self reports of collaborative leadership and the principals' descriptions of collaborative behaviors exhibited by the superintendents. Similarly, several principals referenced superintendent behaviors that were somewhat controlling or autocratic.

It is very evident that there is active consideration and implementation of collaborative constructs in leadership. Collaboration appears to have a natural role or fit in leadership behaviors of superintendents of improving and non-improving divisions and is regularly exercised between various constituent groups. However, there are times which necessitate a superintendent's actions being more autocratic than collaborative.

Has the superintendent articulated a vision formulated through a collaborative process?

Collectively, all superintendents and principals stated that a clear vision for educational improvement had been articulated. Visions ranged from very generic and global to very specific and focused. It was interesting to note that superintendents and principals described the articulated vision somewhat differently. It was obvious that superintendents had communicated a vision or at least a consistent theme for student achievement. However, the depth of meaning for that vision as described by the superintendents was missing in descriptions provided by principals. Superintendents of both improving and non-improving divisions seemed to include some details for future direction for the division in their description of the vision. This implied that the vision was not static, but rather dynamic and that the superintendent had to continue to look beyond what was being addressed and accomplished now. These future thoughts were not

part of the vision as shared by the principals.

The divergence came in the development of the vision. In general, vision development did not occur as the result of a specific, collaborative process. Only superintendents from three divisions referenced a strategic, collaborative process utilized to develop a vision for educational improvement. Notably, two of those divisions were part of the non-improving group. Influence of many years of work in leadership and/or longevity in the community was cited several times as the source for the superintendent's vision. Though these sources do not reflect specific collaborative effort, they do suggest the indirect effects of collaborative relationships with various constituents over time. Clear school board expectations was the next most frequently stated vision source. Implications from Virginia's reform initiatives through the Standards of Learning (SOL) are interwoven throughout in the articulated visions.

Does the superintendent have an understanding of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement? Overwhelmingly, superintendents of both improving and non-improving divisions indicated they had strong knowledge and understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to address educational improvement. The strength of knowledge ranged from moderate to high. Superintendents expressed that their career paths in education had contributed significantly to their overall knowledge of curriculum and instruction. They cited experiences such as teacher, psychologist, building principal, and director of instruction as having valuable foundational influence on their ability to diagnose local educational need and discern possibilities for educational improvement.

All but one principal shared the superintendents' self-assessment of their knowledge of curriculum and instruction and resulting educational improvement. Principals shared that

superintendent knowledge of curriculum and instruction is extremely valuable in setting direction for the schools. Together, superintendents and principals are able to discuss and plan for educational improvement. In the case of the one principal who did not concur with the superintendent's understanding of curriculum and instruction, it was felt that facility needs and subsequent facility improvements had overshadowed leadership in instruction. That superintendent, according to the principal, had been more effective in creating a physical environment for learning than in actually addressing educational needs.

How does the superintendent employ change processes to impact improved student achievement?

All participants strongly felt that change was a reality that had to be addressed and not avoided. As instructional leaders, superintendents had to model embracing change as a means to draw all constituents into the belief system that change can lead to positive outcomes for student achievement. The superintendent's role almost became that of "cheerleader" when employing change to influence student achievement. A team approach to addressing change evolved from discussions with superintendents and principals. The mantra became we are all in this together to address common issues to meet a common goal - vision for improved student achievement.

Superintendents have had to focus on matters of the pace of change, purpose for change, shared responsibility and support in order to employ change as a means of ensuring improved student achievement. In at least two divisions, significant reorganization in roles and personnel in central office occurred. In other divisions, shifts in responsibilities created desired results.

Principals view the change process and changes employed as having a direct impact on the instructional programs in their buildings. The changes have caused all involved to focus more on the academic needs of students. Stronger leadership teams, including superintendent,

principal and central office administrators, within the division have evolved as a result of the changes.

Is the superintendent's leadership influenced by historical, community, and organizational contexts? Historical, community, and organizational contexts definitely influence the leadership decisions made by superintendents. During an era of educational reform in Virginia, superintendents have had to face mandates for standards and student achievement. Community expectations for meeting standards and student achievement have waxed and waned throughout. Since Virginia's reform efforts were initiated in 1995 some communities have supported superintendent efforts to raise the bar for all because they view schools as being an integral part of overall community success. For those divisions support has come through increased funding for instructional programs, teacher salaries and construction. For other communities the desire to meet standards is expressed, however, additional support to accomplish the task is not a reality.

Superintendents and principals face daily pressure in an era of increased accountability for student achievement. Participants in this study indicated that developing a vision, setting high standards and supporting efforts of teachers and students have been critical in the initial years of reform. A set road map is essential for "staying the course" when so many competing internal and external influences are present.

Conclusions and Interpretations

The salient question in this study was in those schools where a significant increase in student achievement occurred, what behaviors of the superintendent contributed to this improvement in student achievement? It was anticipated by this researcher that the leadership behaviors and actions of superintendents of improving school divisions would be substantially

different from those in non-improving divisions. However, through self-reports from superintendents, corroborated by principals, the realization was that superintendents of non-improving divisions displayed and employed behaviors similar to those of their peers in improving divisions.

A number of themes emerged during the discussions with superintendents and principals of improving and non-improving divisions that may shed light on the findings. First, the need to improve educational opportunities for all students along with Virginia's reform efforts and increased accountability has forced superintendents to closely examine instructional practices in their divisions. As a result, it is no longer "business as usual." In most cases the entire instructional infrastructure, including curriculum development and alignment, staffing, data collection and disaggregation, and resource allocation has been scrutinized in an attempt to address improved student achievement. Time to effect the necessary revisions within the instructional infrastructure became a critical link to student achievement. Time was needed to make curricular adjustments and to provide training to teachers to assist them in teaching the new SOL. Time was also a factor for students to become acclimated with the enhanced instructional rigor. Since the initial administration of the SOL tests in 1998, remediation opportunities have been available to students to assist them in mastering the revised SOL. Recognizing that educational reform was upon them, the superintendents in this study embraced change early on and initiated actions to move their divisions forward.

A second theme advanced the impact of increased accountability on improved student achievement. Virginia's revised Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA) set the bar and raised expectations for all school divisions. Superintendents in this study had to face

this reality head-on by accepting the challenge themselves and by encouraging teachers and staff to grasp the reins of change to benefit the children they serve. While superintendents were exercising collaborative leadership, there were references to holding all involved accountable for student achievement. Greater accountability has changed expectations for staff and in turn a significant increase in monitoring.

Superintendents have demonstrated to parents and the community the presence of change and the need for greater support from the community to meet the goals and standards of improved student achievement. Schools are obviously getting more attention with the increased mandates. Community focus is now more on instruction than it has ever been in the past. As a result some increase in local community funding for schools has occurred. Many communities are concerned about the schools' performance on the SOL because they do not want to be recognized as a poor performing school division.

Increased mandates for educational reform have created a unique situation where school divisions in Virginia are striving towards the same standards. The goals being clearly established and time lines fixed, superintendents have the tremendous responsibility to guide their divisions to meet the standards. The initial Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments were administered in 1998. This study focused on those divisions that either did or did not demonstrate significant improvement on the 1999 SOL assessments. A conceptual framework drawn from literature on the instructional leadership behaviors of superintendents framed the study. The findings show that there is essentially no difference in reported instructional leadership behaviors of superintendents of improving and non-improving divisions.

If the instructional leadership behaviors of superintendents of both improving and non-

improving divisions are similar, what then attributed to the variance in student achievement as measured by the 1998 and 1999 SOL assessments? Since the 1998 assessments all divisions in this study have shown continuous gains in student achievement as measured by the SOL assessments. “The results of the SOL tests given in the spring of 1998 indicated that most public schools face a challenge in their efforts to meet the higher expectations set by the State Board of Education. Only 39 (2.2 percent) of more than 1800 schools in Virginia met the future school accreditation requirements in the four core SOL subjects - English, mathematics, science, and history an social science” (Virginia Department of Education, 1998, p i).

A total of thirty-five (35) schools comprise the eight participant school divisions. Based on 2001 SOL data, nine (9) schools have already achieved status of “Fully Accredited.” Eleven (11) schools are “Provisionally Accredited: Meets State Standards,” twelve (12) schools are “Provisionally Accredited: Needs Improvement,” and only three (3) schools are “Accredited with Warning.” These ratings represent improvement over the 2000 SOL ratings where seven (7) schools were “Accredited with Warning,” fourteen (14) schools were “Provisionally Accredited: Needs Improvement,” eleven (11) schools were “Provisionally Accredited: Meets State Standards” and only three (3) schools were “Fully Accredited.” Two of the “Fully Accredited” schools were in the same district.

A similar pattern is noted with the eight schools that were part of the study. Based on 2001 SOL data, one (1) school is “Fully Accredited” (from a non-improving division), three (3) schools are “Provisionally Accredited: Meets State Standards” (one from an improving division and two from non-improving divisions), three (3) schools are “Provisionally Accredited: Needs Improvement” (two from improving divisions and one from a non-improving division) and one

(1) school is “Accredited with Warning” (non-improving division). From the 2000 data, two (2) schools were “Provisionally Accredited: Meets State Standards” (two from improving divisions and one from a non-improving division), four (4) were “Provisionally Accredited: Needs Improvement” (all from non-improving divisions) and two (2) were “Accredited with Warning” (one each from an improving division and a non-improving division). (See Table 11).

None of the schools from the improving divisions that were “Provisionally Accredited” after the second year of SOL tests have gained full accreditation. One of the improving division schools actually was “Accredited with Warning” during the 2000-01 school year. The one school to reach full accreditation is from the non-improving divisions. All of the schools in the non-improving division were rated “Accredited with Warning” during 1999-00. Only one of those schools remains “Accredited with Warning.” The design of this study does not allow the researcher to draw conclusions relating to the performance of the participating schools. Schools are similar in per pupil expenditure and demographics as noted in the 1997-98 Superintendent’s Annual Report for Virginia. There has been substantial turnover in the principalship of participating divisions. This primarily accounted for only eight schools participating in the study since the same principal had not served in that building for at least two consecutive years since 1997-98.

In general, these gains appear to support both the conceptual framework and the findings of this study. What we have failed to take into account is time. Apparently it took a while for some schools and divisions to jumpstart improved student achievement related to their reform efforts. Some school divisions had launched efforts to reform instruction to enhance student achievement prior to the revised SOA. These divisions may have had a slight advantage over

their peers who did not initiate reform efforts until after the adoption of the 1995 revised Standards of Learning (SOL). It is interesting to note that the schools in the improving divisions do not appear to have sustained the momentum realized after the first two years of the SOL assessments.

Table 11: Accreditation Performance of Participating Schools 1998-2001

DIVISION	SCHOOL	SCHOOL ACCREDITATION RATINGS			
		1997-98 Tests 1998-99 Rating*	1998-99 Tests 1999-00 Rating	1999-00 Tests 2000-01 Rating	2000-01 Tests 2001-02 Rating
Superintendent 1	No schools participating				
Superintendent 2	School 1	Provisional	Provisionally Accredited	Provisionally Accredited/Meets State Standards	Provisionally Accredited/Meets State Standards
Superintendent 3	School 1	Provisional	Provisionally Accredited	Provisionally Accredited/Meets State Standards	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement
Superintendent 4	School 1	Provisional	Provisionally Accredited	Accredited with Warning	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement
NON-IMPROVING					
Superintendent 5	School 1	Provisional	Accredited with Warning	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement	Provisionally Accredited/Meets State Standards
	School 2	Provisional	Accredited with Warning	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement	Provisionally Accredited/Meets State Standards
Superintendent 6	School 1	Provisional	Accredited with Warning	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement
	School 2	Provisional	Accredited with Warning	Provisionally Accredited/Needs Improvement	Fully Accredited
Superintendent 7	School 1	Provisional	Accredited with Warning	Accredited with Warning	Accredited with Warning
Superintendent 8	No schools participating				

* All schools had a Provisional Accreditation

Relation of Results to Literature

The conceptual framework and guiding questions for this study were developed from the literature on the instructional leadership role of superintendents. The five areas of the conceptual framework were:

1. **The leadership style for a superintendent must be collaborative and exercised between teachers, administrators and other constituents.**
2. **Superintendents must be able to articulate a clear vision for educational improvement that is drawn from collaborative relationships with constituents.**
3. **Superintendents must have an understanding of curriculum and instruction that allows them to diagnose local educational need as well as discern possibilities for educational improvement.**
4. **Superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes as a means of insuring improved student achievement.**
5. **All leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational.**

Overall, the findings of this study support the literature on the instructional role of superintendents to improve student achievement. A key conclusion of Johnson's (1996a, p. xii) study of the superintendency was "the model of effective leadership that emerged...is a collaborative one, in which superintendents work together with their constituents to improve public education." This conclusion has been further supported by the work of others including Wissler and Ortiz (1998), Keith and Girling (1991), Carter and Cunningham (1997), and AASA (1993), Morgan and Petersen (2000). The superintendent participants, in general, exercise

collaborative leadership drawing in the appropriate constituents depending on the issue.

Constituents tended to include teachers, administrators, parents, business-people, government representatives and the community at large.

Superintendents were quick to note that there are times when their actions have to be direct and authoritarian. These behaviors are not contrary to the literature on collaboration. Keith and Girling (1991, p. 333) stated “Although participation suggests greater decentralization and a more democratic approach to management, developing a participatory organization requires strong leadership where traditional structures and procedures run counter.” There are some decisions for which the superintendent must claim sole responsibility.

The second area of the conceptual framework evolved around the concept that superintendents must articulate a clear vision developed through a collaborative process. The findings of this study revealed that all of the participating superintendents had a vision or focus that had been clearly articulated. Wissler and Ortiz (1988) advance the notion that superintendents must be able to control the “technological core” or information as a point of influencing successful change. A pivotal piece of information is the vision. People have to understand where they are headed, along with the purpose for the direction, in order to embrace a vision for improved student achievement. Doug Reeves (2000, p. 214) in discussing school reform and accountability believes that the “role of the superintendent begins with vision, expectations and standards.” Morgan and Petersen’s (2000, p. 19) study

demonstrated that district superintendents must have a vision for instruction...when principals and board members view their superintendents as articulating a clear instructional vision, they also perceive a significant relationship between this vision and

programs, planning and overall instructional success of the district.

Most of the superintendents in this study did not report that the vision they set forth had been developed in a true collaborative manner. Rather, several superintendents drew upon their collaborative experiences and interactions with various constituents. This reflection resulted in an indirect collaborative process. Superintendents assigned meaning to the collective beliefs, desires and realities of teachers, parents, community as well as leadership experiences to establish an operational vision. While the process employed by the superintendents in the study may have been contrary to the literature support for collaborative development of a vision, effective visions still emerged.

The third area of the conceptual framework centered on the superintendent's knowledge of curriculum and instruction, its evaluation and implementation for educational improvement. The 2000 AASA Study of the Superintendency indicates that instructional expertise was rising as a primary consideration for the selection of superintendents. Clearly, during an era of educational reform with specific standards, instruction has to be a focal point (Carter and Cunningham, 1997; DiPaola and Stronge, 2000; Johnson, 1996a; Sergiovanni, 1984). Superintendents as the instructional leaders of the school division are expected to lead schools toward improvement in educational opportunities for students. "The function of the district leader is not merely to report the data, but to analyze, interpret and most importantly, use the information from the accountability and assessment systems to inform policy and leadership decisions" (Reeves, 2000, p. 220). It is evident from the findings of this study that the participating superintendents exhibited behaviors of knowledge of curriculum and instruction along with the ability to diagnose local educational need and discern possibilities for educational improvement put forth in the

literature.

Forty percent (40%) of the superintendents in the AASA Study of the Superintendency (Glass, et al., 2000) reported that their boards expected them to be educational or instructional leaders. "In the past decade, education literature has focused on instructional leadership as the key to being an effective principal or superintendent. An accompanying theme has been to demand superintendents and principals be initiators of school reform initiatives rather than maintainers of the *status quo*" (Glass, et al., 2000, pp. vi-vii). Morgan and Petersen's (2000, p. 19) investigation demonstrated "that the superintendent's involvement with evaluation and monitoring instruction is perceived as significant component in the instructional leadership of the district."

The tenet of the fourth area of the conceptual framework was the notion that superintendents must be able to implement and monitor change processes to improve student achievement. "School boards expect the superintendent to be a leader of change and a prime influence on establishing a district vision" (Glass, et al., 2000, p. 4). Johnson (1996a) described the superintendent's role as either a leader to manage change or as a leader of change. The literature makes a strong case for superintendents functioning as change agents in an era of educational reform (AASA, 1993; Carter and Cunningham, 1997; Johnson, 1996a; Norton, et al., 1996; Sergiovanni, 1996).

Superintendents in this study readily recognized the role they had in addressing change in their school divisions. Superintendents expressed that they had to grab the reins of change as facilitators to ensure that their divisions were moving forward during a time of change. Resistance to change was evident on several fronts. It was felt internally from teachers and staff. Externally, parents expressed concerns that children were being pushed too hard. Superintendents had to

facilitate the change process with the resisters at the same time they were pushing ahead change in the instructional program. Superintendents in the study assumed the cloak of “transformational superintendents” to carry out the mandates set forth by the standards movement in Virginia (Mitchell and Tucker, in Norton, et al., 1996; Owens, 1995; Schlechty, 2000).

The final component of the conceptual framework stated that all leadership is shaped by the contexts in which it occurs - historical, community and organizational. In this study it was obvious that the leadership behaviors of superintendents were significantly influenced by the various contexts. Schools have been involved with reform efforts since the major educational reports of the 1980's (Bjork, 1993; Carter and Cunningham, 1997; Deal, 1992; Gross, 1985; Wissler, 1988). The recent standards movement has raised the bar for school divisions. Superintendents in this study, just as their colleagues across the nation, struggle with unlocking the chains of history while dealing with the current pressures of reform. Communities expect a lot, however, their support does not always follow the expectations.

Johnson's (1996a) study of the superintendency describes the three types of leadership a superintendent must exercise - educational, managerial and political. Similarly, the AASA Professional Standards for the Superintendency (1993) discusses the principle that there are many influences from within and outside the organization. These influences impact organizational, curricular and managerial decisions. A superintendent must be adept in exhibiting leadership through the various contexts in which they operate. “Despite the rise of special interest and pressure groups, the superintendent seems to be still very influential in affecting board decisions” (Glass, et al., 2000, p. vi). The participants in this study demonstrated the attention given to having to navigate among the various contexts.

Recommendations for Practice

This study, though limited in its scope, has generated a number of implications for practice in the superintendency. Current and aspiring superintendents must be open and willing to engage in collaborative leadership behaviors to effect improvement in student achievement.

Superintendents cannot be so preoccupied with transactional behaviors and the traditional relationships and structures that they miss opportunities for shared decision making.

Superintendents must move into the transformational realm of leadership which involves risk taking with a focus on shared decision making where professional staff agree about educational goals and strategies for their attainment (Mitchell and Tucker, in Norton, et al., 1996; Owens, 1995; Schlechty, 2000).

Direct and indirect involvement of superintendents in the division's curriculum and instruction will continue as a predominant leadership function for superintendents. Research is rich with information on the role principal leadership plays in improving student achievement. Recently, the Governor's Best Practice Centers with the Virginia Department of Education completed "A Study of Effective Practices Leading to Student Success" (November 2000). Sixteen (16) effective practices were identified in schools where there were high numbers of students eligible for free and reduced lunch and where achievement on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests was high. Several practices identified in that study corroborate the conceptual framework developed for this study of the superintendency. The common areas are: leadership, administrative support, curriculum alignment, mapping and pacing, assessment. "Ninety-two percent (92%) of the time leadership was identified as an effective practice which included creating a vision and mission, planning for student achievement, an utilizing team-

building strategies” (VA DOE, 2000, pp. 14-15). While the Department of Educational study specifically examined the leadership role of principals, the behaviors parallel those identified for the superintendency.

While leadership was identified separately as an effective practice, researchers noted that activities commonly associated with leadership occurred throughout many of the other effective practices. Principals in these schools understood instruction, knew their students and staff, and established a vision for the school. While the principal set the stage for leadership, he or she was not alone in the leadership role. Specifically, the principal empowered teachers as leaders to work together to improve student achievement. It was often explained that “the principal provides leadership for the teachers to work together.” This resulted in school leadership that provided focus, established ownership, and developed a collaborative system for monitoring progress toward increased student achievement (VA DOE, 2000, pp. 24-25).

Despite superintendent leadership within the organization, superintendents will still have to be astute in dealing with the historical, organizational and community contexts within which they function in. It will take continued support by the community, including the governing bodies, to shore up the improvement in student achievement recognized by educational reform.

For the superintendency to survive and flourish into the 21st century, superintendents will need to serve as role models, demonstrating the high degree of professionalism necessary to increase their influence in policymaking at the local and state levels. In addition, they will need to attract political support by encouraging needed changes in curriculum and educational technology clearly aligned to a strategic vision. A focus on the future, which

involves all the players both inside and outside the school district will make the job of the superintendent that of a master juggler in an increasingly complex organization (Carter and Cunningham, 1997, as cited in Glass, et al., 2000, pp. 6-7).

Recommendations for Future Research

A great deal remains to be researched regarding the instructional leadership behaviors of superintendents during this era of educational reform. The limited scope of this study by including only superintendents from divisions of 5000 students or less needs to be expanded. Since the behaviors of superintendents in both improving and non-improving divisions were congruent in this study, a more in depth look at the leadership behaviors that influence student achievement is warranted. Specifically, it will be valuable to explore the variables of time along with the aspects of the conceptual framework addressed in this study.

As reform efforts continue and school divisions strive to meet Virginia's prescribed standards, it will be interesting to observe the influence time has on student achievement when the instructional leadership behaviors, as demonstrated by participants in this study, are present. Additionally, the impact of stability of superintendent leadership in sustaining improvement over time is an area for consideration. Reform efforts need the consistent work of the same superintendent for at least five years to be sustaining.

A second area for additional study would be further exploration of the direct involvement superintendents have in curriculum and instruction decisions. This study limited its discussion to superintendents and principals. It would be interesting to note the perceptions of school board members and teachers as they relate to instructional leadership to improve student achieve.

The researcher in this study initiated the work from her perspective as a central office

administrator in a division of about 5000 students experiencing significant improvement annually on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. The former superintendent of that division exhibited most of the behaviors supported by this study.

As this study was completed, the researcher was directly able to view the instructional leadership behaviors of a superintendent in a division of 36,000 students. Interestingly, that division is in the midst systemic change efforts to improve student achievement for all students. This researcher can observe the superintendent's behaviors through the lens of this study. From an observational standpoint, it is interesting to note that despite the existence of a middle level of principal supervision between the superintendent and principals, collaborative behaviors that influence instructional practices and development of a vision within the various contexts operating is present. Expanding a study such as this one to larger divisions could enhance generalizability of the findings for practice.

Appendix A: Interview Letters and Protocols

March 15, 2001

Superintendent
School Division
Address

Dear (Superintendent):

I am a doctoral student at the College of William and Mary completing a dissertation in the Educational Policy, Planning and Leadership program. The purpose of my study is to examine the behaviors of superintendents during an era of educational reform in Virginia. In particular the research is seeking to determine what role the superintendent played in improving student achievement on the Standards of Learning assessment.

Your school division has been selected for inclusion in this study. Data will be collected via thirty (30) minute interviews with the superintendent and certain principals, either by phone or in person. Eligible principals will also be asked to complete a five (5) minute survey. Principals included in the study must have served in that position in the same school for both the 1997-98 and 1998-99 school years.

As division superintendent, you can assist in this study by participating in the short interview and consenting to principals being contacted for participation. You may be assured of complete confidentiality. The *"Informed Consent Form"* is enclosed.

A pre-addressed, stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience to return the *"Intent to Participate"* form. Please return this form no later than March 30, 2001. You may also fax the form to 757-538-1029. Interviews will be scheduled beginning the week of March 26, 2001.

Thank you for considering this valuable research. If you have questions about this request, please contact me at 757-538-3516 or at mboone@whro.net or my advisor Dr. Robert J. Hanny at 757-221-2334 or rjhann@wm.edu. I look forward to interviewing you.

Sincerely,

Melinda J. Boone
Doctoral Candidate

Robert J. Hanny, Ph. D.
Advisor

Enclosure

INTENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

I have been fully informed of the dissertation research project being conducted by Melinda J. Boone (757-538-3516; mboone@whro.net), under the direction of Dr. Robert J. Hannay (757-221-2334; rjhann@wm.edu) from the College of William and Mary.

_____ My school division **will** participate in the research project.

_____ My school division **will not** participate in the research project.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The following is a description of the dissertation research project being conducted by Melinda J. Boone (757-538-3516; mboone@whro.net), under the direction of Dr. Robert J. Hanny (757-221-2334; rjhann@wm.edu) from the College of William and Mary.

The purpose of this study is to examine the behaviors of superintendents during an era of educational reform in Virginia. In particular the research is seeking to determine what role the superintendent played in improving student achievement on Standards of Learning assessment.

The results of the study will be used to fulfill the dissertation requirements for the Doctorate in Education. Subsequent publications and/or presentations may result from the work.

The research seeks to analyze participants' responses in relation to the conceptual framework for instructional leadership of the superintendent developed by the researcher and based on the literature. Data will be collected via thirty (30) minute interviews with superintendents and principals. Principals will also be asked to complete a five (5) minute survey. The names of all school divisions, schools, superintendents and principals will be held in strictest confidence. The names of all participants will only be known to the researcher and dissertation chairperson. Actual names of divisions, schools and participants will be replaced with pseudonyms in all writing.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice. You also have the right to clarify any responses and to refuse to answer any of the questions.

Your signature indicates you have been informed of the purpose and nature of the study and subsequently agree to participate.

Printed Name

Signature

Date

SUPERINTENDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this study is to explore superintendents' instructional leadership during an era of educational reform in Virginia. Five areas have emerged from the literature that impact the superintendent's behavior in instructional leadership. They are:

- **Leadership**
- **Vision**
- **Curriculum and Instruction**
- **Change Process**
- **Contexts influencing behaviors.**

This interview will explore superintendent's behaviors in the five areas and their subsequent impact on student achievement.

1. **Describe your overall leadership style.**
2. **We often talk about vision or the expectation that the superintendent "should have a clear idea about where to take the organization and a plan to get it there" (Johnson, 1996, p. 297).**
 - A. **What is your vision?**
 - B. **Where did it come from?**
3. **Describe your approach to leadership as it pertains to instruction.**
4. **Superintendents possess a variety of skills. Superintendents have strengths and weaknesses associated with those skills. There are three areas to consider when discussing curriculum and instruction - teaching/learning process, assessment and staff development. A continuum exists ranging from high knowledge of curriculum and instruction to limited or no knowledge of curriculum and instruction.**
 - A. **Where are you on that continuum?**

- B. How would you rate yourself on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being high knowledge and 10 being no knowledge, in each of the three areas:**
- **Teaching/learning process**
 - **Assessment**
 - **Staff development**
- C. It is important to monitor progress the division is making.**
- **How do you monitor progress?**
 - **Who does the monitoring for you?**
- 5. We are in an era of educational reform in Virginia. Reflect on your division prior to 1995 and the SOL revisions and new accountability standards, and since 1995.**
- A. What was the community's perception of the division and its expectations?**
- B. Have there been organizational or staff changes since 1995?**
- C. What are the expectations of the governing body? Is there heightened concern since 1995?**
- 6. No one questions the fact that major changes have occurred with revisions to the Standards of Learning (SOL). There were many issues early on involving change. For example, many questioned whether or not the revisions would be systemic or temporary change. The superintendent is recognized as the point person addressing change.**
- A. How have you dealt with the pressures relating to change?**
- B. How did you address change with the staff?**

This concludes the interview. Please know how much I appreciate your willingness to participate. Do you have any questions? Again, thank you!

PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of this study is to explore superintendents' instructional leadership during an era of educational reform in Virginia. Five areas have emerged from the literature that impact the superintendent's behavior in instructional leadership. They are:

- Leadership
- Vision
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Change Process
- Contexts influencing behaviors.

This interview will explore superintendent's behaviors in the five areas and their subsequent impact on student achievement.

1. A. Is there a clearly stated vision or clear expectations for instruction?
 - B. What is that vision and how was it developed?
 - C. How has your behavior as principal changed as a result of the superintendent's shared vision or expectation?
 - D. How has the superintendent's vision impacted your school's vision for instruction?
2. What has been the superintendent's approach to leadership?
3. What role has the superintendent played in affecting improvement in student achievement in your building?
4. We are in an era of educational reform in Virginia. Reflect on this division prior to 1995 and the SOL revisions and new accountability standards, and since 1995.
 - A. What was the community's perception of the division and its expectations?
 - B. Have there been organizational or staffing changes since 1995?
 - C. What are the expectations of the governing body? Is there a heightened concern since 1995?

This concludes the interview. Please know how much I appreciate your willingness to participate. Do you have any questions? Please don't forget to return the SILS survey by fax - 757-538-1029. Again, thank you!

Superintendent as Instructional Leader Survey (SILS)

Survey

Please describe the superintendent's involvement in these facets of the instructional program in your division by circling the number that most closely corresponds with the superintendent's current behaviors.

		High		Low	
1.	Collaboratively developing goals	4	3	2	1
2.	Evaluating instructional effectiveness	4	3	2	1
3.	Facilitating instruction through budget	4	3	2	1
4.	Planning for instruction	4	3	2	1
5.	Supervising instruction	4	3	2	1
6.	Monitoring instructional program	4	3	2	1
7.	Developing principals as instructional leaders	4	3	2	1
8.	Developing instructional policies	4	3	2	1
9.	Reviewing research	4	3	2	1
10.	Selecting personnel (at any level)	4	3	2	1
11.	Facilitating staff development	4	3	2	1
12.	Communicating system expectations	4	3	2	1

Comments. Please use the space below or the back of the page if you wish to comment on any statement.

G. Wayne Watts, Ed.D., 1992. University of Georgia.

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