A Case Study of the Challenges and Strategies of Rural School Superintendent/Principals in California

Christine McCormick

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.brandman.edu/edd_dissertations

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, and the Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons

Recommended Citation


This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Brandman Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Brandman Digital Repository. For more information, please contact jlee1@brandman.edu.
A Case Study of the Challenges and Strategies of
Rural School Superintendent/Principals in California

A Dissertation by

Christine McCormick

Brandman University
Irvine, California
School of Education
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership
March 2016

Committee in charge:
Cindy Petersen, Ed.D. Committee Chair
Keith Larick, Ed.D.
Jody Graf, Ed.D.
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
Chapman University System
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Christine McCormick is approved.

Cindy Petersen, Ed.D
Dissertation Chair

Keith Larick, Ed.D
Committee Member

Jody Graf, Ed.D
Committee Member

March 3, 2016

Patricia Clarke-Thie, Associate Dean
A Case Study of the Challenges and Strategies of

Rural School Superintendent/Principals in California

Copyright © 2016

by Christine McCormick
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Any great project requires a team of people who offer support, expertise, advice and skill. Writing this dissertation is no different. It was very much a team effort and I appreciate everyone who provided me the support to see it to completion.

The amazing team that was my dissertation committee, I could not have done this without you. I was blessed with an amazing dissertation chair, Dr. Cindy Peterson, who inspires me everyday to think big, live my dreams, and go forward without fear; your advice and expertise, as well as hugs and love, where so valuable to me. The rest of my committee, Dr. Keith Larick and Dr. Jody Graff, thank you for your support, advice, commitment, encouragement and positivety throughout the entire process.

The team that became the “terrific trio” provided me the courage and motivation to finish strong. Our monthly brunches became a time of laughter, story telling, sharing of fears and provided so much to support to me in this process. I truly could not have had done it without the hugs, tears and love that we shared. Thank you Melanie Dopson and Jennifer Ramos for being such great friends and always being there to remind me that this was possible. I was truly blessed to have you as part of my team.

The Brandman Roseville Beta Cohort and the leadership of Dr. Pat Ainsworth provided me the opportunity to be part of an amazing team of leaders. I grew immensely from being part of the experiences we shared in completing our coursework and doctoral journey together. The team we became after two years of Saturday meetings and Immersion weekends was amazing. I am so glad to have gotten to know each and everyone of you.
My parents, Marge and Sid Muck, gave me the skills to persevere and take risks to achieve my dreams. From the child that they were not sure would ever get her bachelors degree to the woman I have become, could not have been possible without their love and support. I am blessed to have such wonderful parents.

My home team, James Lohman, Helen McCormick, and Ross McCormick is the team that deserves the most important recognition. Their patience while I wrote a yet another paper, sat on a yet another webinar, visited libraries and read endless articles and books was amazing and I could not have made it without them. I am thankful for them everyday and they were truly my inspiration to complete my doctoral journey.

Finally, thank you to those superintendent/principals who participated in my study and those who are committed to do the amazing work with student’s everyday. I admire your dedication to your students, staff, and community and am inspired by your willingness to take on such a vitally important role of being everything to everybody.
A Case Study of the Challenges and Strategies of Rural School Superintendent/Principals in California

by Christine McCormick

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the corresponding strategies used to mitigate those challenges. The role of the superintendent/principal is considered to be one of the most challenging administrative roles; little if no research had been conducted on the challenges and strategies of this dual administrative role. The target population for the present study was the forty-six superintendent/principals in California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), Region 2. Three superintendent/principals from this target population, who have served four years or more in their role, were selected to be subjects of the case study. The researcher created an interview protocol to address the research questions. Based on the interview responses, additional data was reviewed to support the challenges and strategies identified by the superintendent/principals. This data included, but was not limited too, Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP), budgets, school board minutes and agendas, and parent newsletters. The interview data was transcribed and coded/themed. Research questions 1 and 2 focused on the challenges faced by superintendent/principals and the strategies utilized to mitigate these challenges. Research question 3 gathered demographic data and allowed for the correlation of identified challenges and strategies to those demographics. The Bolman and Deal framework was created to examine leadership in organizations. Their four frames – structural, symbolic, human resource and political –have been used to
evaluate leadership effectiveness, outcomes, and results of change, and have been used to identify leadership orientation in educational and other organizations. The data collected regarding the challenges and the strategies of rural school superintendent/principals was aligned to the Bolman and Deal four frames. The findings revealed the job complexity, staffing and enrollment are the biggest challenges faced by those in the role of superintendent/principal. The strategies reported by the superintendent/principals to mitigate challenges were shared expertise, job definition strategies and shared leadership. The findings did not differ based on the gender, years of experience or years in the role. Alignment to the Bolman and Deal four frames revealed that two challenges aligned to the structural frame and one each to the symbolic, human resource and political frame.
Table of Contents

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION .................................................................................... 1
  Background ........................................................................................................... 4
  Rural School Leadership Challenges - Superintendents .................................... 8
  Rural School Leadership Challenges - Principals .............................................. 8
  Rural School Leadership Challenges – Superintendent/Principals .................. 9
  The Four Frames and Education ..................................................................... 10
  Statement of the Research Problem .................................................................. 10
  Purpose Statement ............................................................................................ 12
  Research Questions ........................................................................................... 12
  Significance of the Problem .............................................................................. 13
  Definitions ........................................................................................................... 15
  Delimitations ...................................................................................................... 15
  Organization of the Study .................................................................................. 16

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ............................................................... 17
  Introduction ......................................................................................................... 17
  Leadership .......................................................................................................... 17
    The Evolution of Leadership Theory ............................................................... 18
    Leadership Defined ......................................................................................... 20
      Charismatic Leadership ............................................................................... 23
      Moral Leadership ......................................................................................... 24
      Directive Leadership ................................................................................... 24
      Participatory Leadership .............................................................................. 24
      Servant Leadership ...................................................................................... 24
      Democratic Leadership ............................................................................... 25
      Authoritarian Leadership ............................................................................ 25
      Laissez-Faire Leadership ............................................................................. 26
      Transactional Leadership ............................................................................. 26
      Transformational Leadership .................................................................... 27
  Leadership and Demographics ........................................................................ 29
    Gender ............................................................................................................. 29
    Experience ...................................................................................................... 31
    Level of Education .......................................................................................... 32
  Leadership and Educational Systems ............................................................... 33
  Rural School Leadership .................................................................................... 41
  Rural School Leadership Challenges .............................................................. 43
  School Leadership Roles ................................................................................... 43
    Superintendent Leadership .......................................................................... 44
    Principal Leadership ....................................................................................... 44
    Superintendent/Principal Leadership ........................................................... 45
  Challenges of School Leaders ........................................................................... 46
    Superintendent Challenges ............................................................................ 46
    Principal Challenges ....................................................................................... 46
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent/Principal Challenges</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Frame</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Frame</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource Frame</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Frame</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria to Analyze the Four Frames</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four Frames and Education</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis Matrix</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Study Methodology</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Case Study Methodology</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Test – Reliability</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validity</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Test</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation and Analysis of Data</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of the job</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Leadership</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Expertise</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Definition</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

The Symbolic Frame .......................................................... 87  
The Structural Frame .......................................................... 88  
The Human Resource Frame .................................................. 89  
The Political Frame ............................................................ 89  
Summary .............................................................................. 95  

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .......... 98  
Purpose Statement ...................................................................... 99  
Research Questions ..................................................................... 99  
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures ............................. 99  
Population ............................................................................... 100  
Sample ..................................................................................... 101  
Major Findings .......................................................................... 102  
  Research Question 1 .................................................................. 102  
  Research Question 2 .................................................................. 103  
  Research Question 3 .................................................................. 105  
  Connecting the Findings to Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames ............... 105  
  The Symbolic Frame .................................................................. 105  
  The Structural Frame .................................................................. 105  
  The Human Resource Frame ....................................................... 106  
  The Political Frame .................................................................... 106  
  Summary of connections of findings to Bolman and Deal’s four frames .... 107  
Unexpected Findings ..................................................................... 107  
Conclusions ............................................................................... 108  
Implications for Action .................................................................. 111  
Recommendations for Further Research ............................................ 118  
Concluding Remarks and Reflections .............................................. 119  

REFERENCES ............................................................................. 122  

APPENDICES ............................................................................. 139
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Kouzes and Posner’s five practices and ten commitments of leadership .......... 23
Table 2. Transformational leadership strategies and characteristics .................. 28
Table 3. Criteria for identifying issues and actions for the four frames .............. 54
Table 4. Superintendent/principal data CCSESA region 2 ............................. 62
Table 5. Indicators for coding interview responses ....................................... 67
Table 6. Participant information ............................................................... 75
Table 7. Codes and frequencies for research Question 1 .............................. 76
Table 8. Enrollment numbers over the last five years for participants .............. 80
Table 9. Codes and frequencies for research Question 2 ............................. 83
Table 10. Challenges and strategies inside Bolman and Deal’s four frames ......... 90
Table 11. Summary of research questions and findings .............................. 96
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Blake, Mouton, Barnes and Greiner Management/Leadership Grid.................. 22
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The history of schooling in the United States can be traced back to the early 17\textsuperscript{th} century. This chapter will outline the evolution of the school system in the United States from its beginning to current practice.

The church viewed schooling in the 17th century as a way to teach religion, support culture, and instill moral values, and was often led by church leaders utilizing religious doctrine (Cremin, 1970). The Bible was considered the textbook, and the time in school was very dependent upon the needs of the family, as children were a huge part of the labor force on the farm (Good & Teller, 1973). Schooling transitioned to a more scripted home-based model called “dame schools.” This early learning, led by their mother, was focused on teaching children to read, and was still dictated by the labor needs of the family (Good & Teller, 1973). The school system then evolved to a more formal “petty school” model that focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic (Cremin, 1961). Prior to 1870, most schooling occurred in one-room schoolhouses (Cremin, 1970). Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, John Pierce and Samuel Lewis were considered the early architects of what we now view as the modern school system (Cremin, 1961). Significant growth of what we view as public schools did not occur until after 1870.

Between 1890 and 1940 the role of the principal began to develop as a change to the previous structure of a lead teacher that was typical in a one-room schoolhouse. This new administrative role began the movement of seeing the principal as a middle manager who was viewed as the school authority to ensure discipline and manage the petty details of running a school (Rousmaniere, 2013). This period also began the formation of what we consider the more formal district structure that we see in schools today, and further
solidified a bureaucratic model of school leadership (Cremin, 1961, 1970; Rousemanire, 2013).

The bureaucratic model, according to Bennis (1997), is a social design to employ rules and law to assist in reaching the goals of an organization. Bennis suggests that such a model is not suited for the needs of organizations in the future. Bureaucratic models aligned to traditional management theory of the early 20th century (Almashaqba & Al-Qeed, 2010) and supported the need for schools to develop a structure for decision-making. The need for efficiency grew as the number of public schools increased and a formal accountability structure, the school district, was created that fit the bureaucratic model. The bureaucratic model promotes efficiency with a leader at the top of the organizational chart, (in current school district structures this represents the superintendent), and a formal chain of command to deliver information, make decisions, and support organizational goals (Pratt, 2014). This type of decision-making structure became further ingrained as school districts expanded and grew in number and size (Elmore, 1999; Oplatka, 2004).

The traditional school district structure has a superintendent who is the district’s chief administrative officer. The role of the superintendent is important in the school district’s hierarchical educational organization (Spring, 1994). The superintendent serves as the liaison between the school district’s school board and the state’s educational leadership (Andero, 2000), communicates the elements of the curriculum, determines district policy, and oversees the district budget. Additionally, district superintendents diagnose needs and recommend improvements, as well as maintain an ongoing dialogue
with the local community (Andero, 2000; Johnson, 1996). The superintendent is the link between the activities of the schools and the school board (Campbell & Green, 1994).

For large school districts there may be additional layers of administrators beneath the superintendent in the organization chart. However, for many districts the role beneath that of the superintendent in the organization chart is the school principal. Principals are viewed as the school’s instructional leader. However, research shows that only 6% of a school leader’s day is focused on instructional or curricular issues (NEA, 2009). The person on a school site who is the most physically removed from the classroom is in charge of the curriculum, as well as being the school’s fiscal agent and the interpreter of public school law. The principal does all this while balancing the needs of the community, the school staff, and the students (Rousmaniere, 2014). In his 2003 book *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, Michael Fullan suggests that the principalship is the only role that is strategically placed to mediate the tensions of state and local forces. Fullan (2003) further suggests that there is a need to clarify the nature of the principal’s role.

In addition to the challenge of defining the power and nature of the role of the principal, rural schools face additional challenges in the area of school leadership, whether that leader is a superintendent, a principal, or a superintendent/principal. Arnold and the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (2004) argued, “rural school districts face a different set of challenges in recruiting administrators than do their urban and suburban counterparts”. In their 2008 study, Canales, Tejeda-Delgado, & Slate agreed that leadership in rural school districts is complex. The financial resources of rural schools are limited and require that leaders in rural schools
wear many hats (Canales et al., 2008; Willis & Harmon, 1992). Principals, superintendents, and superintendent/principals of small rural schools are facing many challenges in the age of accountability, the implementation of new standards, and the transparency of education (Bambrick- Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Fullan, 2014). The 1980s report *A Nation at Risk* discussed the effectiveness of small rural schools as well as the concerns about the education of students in small rural communities (Bard, Gardener & Wieland, 2005).

**Background**

In 1983 the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s publication, *A Nation at Risk*, identified four important aspects of education: content, expectations, time, and teaching. This report did not indicate the influence of the impact of the school structure, its leadership, or the school culture on any of the four identified aspects. However, the report identified education as a system that was being eroded “by a rising tide of mediocrity” (Fullan, 2014). An immediate call was declared to improve our educational system to prepare us to compete in a global economy. The publication moved education reform into the forefront and highlighted some significant achievement gaps between white, black and Hispanic students (Birman et al., 2013). However, there were no discernible strategies presented to meet the crisis (Fullan, 2014).

In 2001 we, as a nation, attempted to reform education with the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB was not a new law, but was rather a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). NCLB mandated the testing in reading and math for all students in grades 3-8. Schools were required to achieve “adequate yearly progress” with student test scores. Additionally, a qualified
teacher must be in place in every classroom, in every school by 2006 (Federal Education Budget Project, 2014). This reform provided the strategy that was lacking in the *A Nation at Risk* but did not prescribe how this would impact the role of the principal (Fullan, 2014).

Concurrently, the nation is navigating the implementation of the current educational policy, Race to the Top, which was introduced in 2009. The Race to the Top initiative (2015) offers incentives to states to generate systemic reform to improve teaching and learning. The four key areas of reform are:

1. Development of rigorous standards and better assessments;
2. Adoption of better data systems to provide schools, teachers, and parents with information about student progress;
3. Support for teachers and school leaders to become more effective;
4. Increased emphasis and resources for the rigorous interventions needed to turn around the lowest-performing schools.

Fullan (2014) suggests that policies and associated strategies are intended to move the education system to new levels of success. For the first time, school leaders are part of the equation as one of the key areas of education reform in Race to the Top. The impact of school leadership continues with the focus on improving the global competitiveness of students in the United States (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Fullan, 2014; Race to the Top, 2015).

In the 2013 school year the funding system for the state of California was restructured. This change in funding provided more local control to districts in regards to spending. However, members of the legislature opposed giving local schools too much
discretion in how to serve students, especially disadvantaged students (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). As a result, school districts are required to complete a multi-indicator Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). This multi-indicator plan requires districts to include stakeholders as part of a transparent planning process to identify goals and budget priorities in eight areas (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). The eight priority areas are outlined below (Fuller & Tobben, 2014, p. 8-12).

1. Basic services
2. Implementation of Common Core State Standards
3. Parental Involvement
4. Student Achievement
5. Student Engagement
6. School Climate
7. Access to a Broad Curriculum
8. Other Student outcomes

The LCAP requires districts to engage stakeholders in the development of the goals and spending priorities for each of the eight priority areas and has resulted in more participation and prioritizing based on stakeholder input in districts (Hahnel, 2014, p 4). The LCAP is to be developed with input and involvement of superintendents, school boards, school staff, parents, students, and community members (Helig, Ward, Weisman & Cole, 2014). In development of the LCAP, the progress towards achievement of goals must be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively (Helig et al, 2014). Additionally, the LCAP is required to be reviewed by advisory committees, is subject to public
comment and must be heard at a minimum of two public school board hearings (Helig et al., 2014). The superintendent must respond to any comments that are made in writing before the LCAP can be approved (Helig et al., 2014). The LCAP is approved at the local level and then submitted to their local County Office of Education prior to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Helig et al., 2014). Districts were required to complete and submit their first board approved LCAP’s to county offices of education by July 2014 (Menefee-Libey & Kerchner, 2015). Every year districts will complete an LCAP update to summarize progress on their identified goals.

Timar (2006) proposes that to realize the effects of the reform to accountability systems “healthy partnerships must exist and these partnerships are an ‘essential condition’ of a robust, effective system of education” (p. 24). Helig et al., 2014, suggest “the challenge for local entities will be the capacity to engage communities in truly equitable locally based school finance and accountability” (p. 889).

In his 2003 work, The Moral Imperative Of School Leadership, Michael Fullan suggests that a “high quality public school system is essential to not only parents who send their children to these schools but also for the public as a whole” (p 4). This thinking is supported by the research on school leaders in rural schools (Arnold & Mid-Continent, 2000; Barley & Beesley, 2007; Budge, 2006; Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Center, 2009; Chalker, 1999; Forner et al., 2012; Geivett, 2010; Jacobson & State University of New York, 1986; Johnson et al., 2014; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Schuman, 2010; Stephens, Turner, & American Association, 1988). Leithwood (2005) states that successful school leaders must be able to respond and adjust to their unique
school contexts and notes that “superintendents are increasingly being called upon to deliver contingent responses to their context-specific challenges.”

**Rural School Leadership Challenges - Superintendents**

Rural superintendents face a very different leadership context than their urban counterparts (Theobald, 1988, 2005). Forner et al. (2012) identified three contextual challenges that distinguish rural school superintendents. The challenges are: “(a) a rural community that is often defined by poverty and economic loss; (b) a rural administrator that is overburdened with a wide range of responsibilities; and (c) a rural school leader forced to serve a unique public role.” Forner et al. (2012) noted that different contexts require leaders to match responses to specific challenges, and that matching leadership to context has important implications.

**Rural School Leadership Challenges - Principals**

In a review of literature developed for the Canadian Society of Education Conference in 2013, by Preston, Jakubiec & Kooymans titled “Common Challenges Faced By Rural Principals,” it was noted that rural principals face sociocultural and economic challenges unique to their school community. Preston et al. (2013) discovered the challenges for rural school leaders included lack of employment opportunities for families in the community, geographic isolation, migration of people from the community, and lower levels of educational credentials. Specifically, they noted that a challenge to a rural school principal is the need for the principal to have a historical perspective about the social, political and cultural aspects of the rural community. (Lock et al., 2012), Preston et al., 2013). Those school leaders who do not share the historical context are viewed with greater suspicion (Browne-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006). An
additional challenge for rural school principals is the many roles they may find themselves assuming, such as classroom teacher and principal of more than one school (Canales, Tejeda-Delgado & Slate, 2008; Cortez-Jimenez, 2012; Wildy, 2004; Masumoto & Browne-Welty, 2009; Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Starr & White, 2009). Masumoto & Brown-Welty (2009) asserted that community members scrutinize the actions of principals and place higher expectations on them in rural schools. Rural school principals are expected to live within the school community, act as a role model, and participate in local events (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Harmon & Schafft, 2009; Lamkin, 2006). Research indicates that parents, community interest, and/or community values can be considered a barrier in improving student achievement and student learning (Arnold, Newman, & Gaddy, 2005; Budge, 2006). “Rural school principals struggle with obtaining school goals and educational objectives, while simultaneously balancing diverse political, social, and personal interests of parents and community members” (Preston et al., 2013, p 5).

Rural School Leadership Challenges – Superintendent/Principals

In small rural districts the role of superintendent/principal was created to serve the traditional roles of site principal and district superintendent. Although research supports the needs and challenges of superintendents and principals, there is little if any research on the challenges that face superintendent/principals (Geivett, 2010). According to the California EdSource report in 2007 even collecting data on who is assuming the role of superintendent/principal is difficult. Tobin (2006) suggests that the primary challenge of the superintendent/principal is having to be all things to all people, and having to serve in multiple roles. Including, sometimes serving as a classroom teacher in addition to their other duties (Canales, Tejajo & Slate, Cortez-Jimenez, 2012; Geivett, 2010). Larger
districts typically have multiple layers of staff to take on all the educational responsibilities, but the superintendent/principal must maintain the opportunities for students to learn while balancing limited resources and limited funding, and having no other administrative support (Canales, Tejajo & Slate, 2010, Copeland, 2013 Geivett, 2010, Tobin, 2006). As previously stated, the research regarding superintendent/principal leadership is limited.

**The Four Frames and Education**

Bolman and Deal (2002) suggest “educational leaders are most effective when they employ practical ways of thinking in schools and classrooms” (p. 2). School leaders who can view situations from more than one angle have been known to be more effective (Bolman and Deal, 2002). Bolman and Deal go on to state: “The ability to use multiple frames has three advantages: (1) each can be coherent, focused, and powerful; (2) the collection can be more comprehensive than any single one; and (3) only when you have multiple frames can you reframe. Reframing is a conscious effort to size up a situation from multiple perspectives and then find a new way to handle it” (p. 3). Roddy (2010) reports that the multi-frame perspective has been applied in many educational settings. Bolman and Deal (2002) report that educators primarily rely on the human resource and structural frames, and then the political frame; the symbolic frame has limited reported use.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

In 1910, 68.4% of students in the United States (11,200,553) were enrolled in a rural school (Monahan, 1913). The majority of these schools were considered country schools with one teacher and one room. The Rural and Community Trust reported in
their May 2014 publication, *Why Rural Matters*, that as of the 2010-11 school year 9,765,385 public school students in the United States were enrolled in rural school districts. That equates to over 20% of the nation’s school children (Johnson, Showlater, Klein, & Lester, 2014). Over half of the public schools in 15 states are considered rural, along with at least one-third of the public schools in 15 other states (Johnson et al., 2014). Eleven states, including some of the most populous and urban, serve more than half of all the rural students in the United States (Johnson et al., 2014).

In their report *Why Rural Matters*, Johnson et al. (2014) gauged the rural schools in the United States on five measures: “1) The importance of rural education, 2) the diversity of rural students and families, 3) socioeconomic challenges facing rural communities across the nation, 4) the Educational Policy Context impacting rural schools, and 5) the Educational Outcomes of students in rural schools in each state” (p. 2). The higher the rankings on the gauge indicated the urgency of rural education matters for that state (Johnson et al., 2014). In the 2005 publication *Providing Rural Students with a High Quality Education*, Gregory Mahlhoit stated that “there must be accountability and capacity building in rural schools” (p. 8). The 2007 Ed Source report also indicates a greater need to support students in rural schools in California due to the number of English learners — a higher percentage than any other state. The need to support students in rural communities is further accentuated due to high levels of poverty over 50 percent in some rural areas, and a larger number of students per administrator in California than in any other state (Ed Source, 2007).

The position of superintendent/principal was created for districts that were small in size due to their rural location, and which also had few resources (Ed Source, 2007).
With this dual role, the same responsibilities exist that exist in a larger school district, but with only one leader to manage them (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Barley & Beesley, 2007; Starr & White, 2008; Southworth, 2004; William & Nierengarten, 2011). Canales, et al. (2008, 2010) and Geivett (2010), noted that the multiple roles and responsibilities of the dual position may impede the leader’s ability to lead effectively.

In their 2008 study, Canales et al. examined leadership behaviors of the superintendent/principal in Texas. In 2010 Canales et al. continued their research on Texas superintendent/principals with a quantitative study on dual roles in which they identified job stressors, role ambiguity, and coping strategies. In 2010, Morton Geivett studied the roles and responsibilities of superintendent/principals in small rural districts in Northern California, especially their perceptions of their most important role and responsibility.

Geivett (2010) suggested that further research be conducted on the specific challenges that are encountered by superintendent/principals.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the corresponding strategies used to mitigate those challenges.

**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the key challenges of the superintendent/principal as perceived by superintendent/principals?
2. What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges?

3. Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal?

**Significance of the Problem**

David Hopkins (2006) believes that there are key strategies to successful school leadership. Hopkins argues that system leadership is what is needed to ensure success. John Hattie, in his 2009 synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement, studied the effects of two major types of leadership: instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Leithwood (2005) reports that classroom instruction has a greater impact on learning outcomes than leadership style.

In 1991, Crowson and Glass reviewed the connection between local education executive officers (superintendents) and school effectiveness. Andero (2000) examined the changing role of the school superintendent with regard to curriculum and decision-making. In 2014, Stack Feinberg examined the role of the school superintendent in redefining schools to develop successful 21st Century students.

In her 2013 book *The Principal’s Office*, Kate Rousmaniere studied the role of the school principal from the 1800s to today, and expressed her belief that the role of the school principal is full of contradictions. Ediger (2014) examined the changing role of the school principal and essential leadership skills. Bruce and Cisler’s 2013 study examined the role of the principal as perceived by school counselors, teachers and others including the community.
The superintendent/principal position is the single most comprehensive administrative position due to the fact that they are completely responsible for the operation of small districts (Geivett, 2010). The combination of job duties, expectations of the community, and the continued reality of school accountability, is experienced by superintendent/principals (Canales et al. 2008, 2010; Harmon & Schafft, 2009; Preston et al., 2013). The role of the rural superintendent/principal is full of multiple responsibilities but with limited opportunities to engage in professional development, as well as having budget limitations because of the small number of students enrolled (Cortez-Jimenez, 2012).

The status of rural education in California is in need of improvement (Johnson et al., 2014), and the ongoing demands of the current leadership structure of superintendent/principal is not an indicator of effective school leadership (Arnold & Mid-Continent, 2000; Barley & Beesley, 2007; Budge, 2006; Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Center, 2009; Chalker, 1999; Forner et al., 2012; Geivett, 2010; Jacobson, 1986; Johnson et al., 2014; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Schuman, 2010; Stephens et al., 1988). The present study will add to the research in the area of challenges, and strategies of rural school superintendent/principals.

The present study is significant because it will identify the key challenges, and strategies of the dual responsibilities of the superintendent/principal position. New and current superintendent/principals can utilize the research to inform their own leadership and development. Additionally, the results of this study can be used as training resources and potential workshop topics by professional organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and the Small School Districts Association.
The research will also inform coaches who support superintendent/principals, as well as those who are seeking positions as a superintendent/principal.

**Definitions**

For the purpose of this study, the following operational definitions apply to the common terms used in this research:

**Rural school:** A school located in a nonmetropolitan county (Rural Assistance Center [RAC], 2007. For the purpose of this study this term may be used interchangeably with small, rural school district.

**School leader:** A superintendent, principal or superintendent/principal that leads a school and/or district.

**Small, rural school district:** A district with an average daily attendance of fewer than 600 students, or districts in which all schools are located in counties with a population density of fewer than 10 persons per square mile, and all schools serve by districts that are located in a rural, nonmetropolitan area (Rural Assistance Center [RAC], 2007). For the purposed of this study this term may be used interchangeably with rural school.

**Superintendent/Principal:** The credentialed administrator who is responsible for performing both district and site-related functions.

**Delimitations**

This study is delimited to superintendent/principals in California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Region 2 who volunteer to be part of the study.
Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study is organized into four additional chapters as well as a bibliography and appendixes. Chapter Two will present a comprehensive literature review that will include a history and definition of leadership and leadership theory in both business and educational settings. Chapter Two will also include a review of the leadership challenges of rural schools and those challenges specific to superintendents, principals and superintendent/principals. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and research design along with the instrumentation, population, and sample. Chapter Four will summarize the data and provide detailed analysis of the findings. Chapter Five will report significant findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study. The appendixes and references follow Chapter Five.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review will define leadership and leadership theory and discuss literature on current leadership theory from a business and educational perspective. It will contextualize the demographic challenges of leadership, define school leadership, and delineate the job duties and challenges of three types of school leaders: superintendents, principals, and superintendent/principals. Additionally, the literature review will provide insights on the challenges of rural schools, and provide the context, utilizing Bolman and Deal’s four frames, needed to support research on the specific needs of superintendent/principals in rural settings.

Leadership

Leadership, as a topic, has been a subject of research from a variety of perspectives since the 1800s. Leadership has been defined in terms such as moral, charismatic, purpose driven, authoritarian, democratic, laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational — to name a few. James Burns is considered to be an expert on the development of leadership theory and reported his theories in his 1978 book titled Leadership. Burns believes that “leadership is a moral undertaking, a response to human wants,” and the task of leadership is to “accomplish some change in the world that responds to those wants” (Burns, 2003, p. 2). However, Burns and others have proposed that the same basic drive exists for all forms of leadership, and that is the drive for power. Power is defined by Burns (1978, 2003) as not just the possession of resources, but also the relationship of the wants, needs, motives, values, and capacity of both leaders and followers.
Burns (2003) proposes three basic tenets related to leadership: ethics, public values, and virtue. Burns defines ethics as the components of the golden rule, using terms such as integrity, promise keeping, and accountability (Burns, 2003, p 28). Public values, according to Burns, are order, liberty, and equality. Burns believes the element of virtue is developed early in life and supports the concepts of equality and honesty. These three tenets, Burns believes, are the basis of historical and current leadership theory, and are evidenced in history when studying the development of leadership theory.

**The Evolution of Leadership Theory**

Early leadership studies were driven by Thomas Caryle’s work in the 1840s around the leadership theory identified as the Great Man Theory. This theory was built on the idea that leaders are born not made. The basis of this understanding was the leadership associated with the military, which was the primary leadership role at the time. Most men were placed in leadership positions based on birthright, and while later determined to have no scientific basis, the theory was built on Caryle’s theory that “effective leaders were the package of Godly motivation and the right personality” (Leadership-Central, 2015). Scholars have continued to present and discuss the scientific merit of the theory of The Great Man and the relationship between birth and leadership, including comparison of new leadership theories to those of The Great Man (Burns, 2003).

Max Weber, a German sociologist, was a prominent contributor to the early research on management and leadership theory (Weber, 1968). Weber paralleled the mechanization of the industrial age to management in the support of the bureaucratic form of administration (Stone & Patterson, 2005). From Weber’s beginnings developed
such theories as classical management and scientific management. It is from this thinking that researchers began to examine the relationship between leader behavior and follower satisfaction (Stone & Patterson, 2005).

McGregor (1960) believed that an examination of human behavior and motivation needed to be conducted to help management gain a better and more accurate understanding of how to improve worker motivation and therefore production. This was a shift from the earlier thinking that treated employees as machines (Stone & Patterson, 2005). The social change and influence of technology of the 1960s–1980s, including the introduction of the computer age, shifted leadership theory to an intricate process of “multilateral brokerage” (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Leadership, as a multilateral brokerage, caused organizations to begin looking within and without the organization to survive, and traditional methods of leadership were beginning to lose their effectiveness (Vanourek, 1995). To meet the needs of the changing work environment, as a result of a societal focus from increasing wealth to more social issues, a contingency/situational theory of leadership was developed by Hersey and Blanchard (Stone & Patterson, 2005; Yukl, 1981). However, the focus on situational supervision did not adapt to the continued need to manage the day-to-day operations of organizations while improving worker productivity. Stone and Patterson (2005) propose that the studies on leadership theory were a result of the move from an agriculturally based economy in the United States to an industrial one.
Leadership Defined

It has been said that there are as many different styles of leadership as there are leaders (Burns, 1978, 2003). It is generally accepted that leadership is composed of three elements:

1. Personality Traits
2. Situation or Task
3. Philosophy (Leadership-Central, 2015)

Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) believed that leadership is rooted in three basic headings:

- Autocratic
- Democratic
- Free-Reign

Blake, Mouton, Barnes and Greiner, in their 1964 article for the *Harvard Business Review*, developed a management/leadership grid outlining leadership on a continuum. The styles were presented and categorized by management’s concern for people, production, and motivation. Blake, Mouton, Barnes and Greiner believed that leadership moved from self-centered (indifferent) to sound. The leadership characteristics were identified as:

- Indifferent or Impoverished: Indicated by high turnover, employee dissatisfaction, and lack of harmony leading to inefficient organizational operations.
- Country Club or Accommodating: Happy employees but low productivity.
• Status Quo or Middle of the Road: This type of leader attempts to balance the needs of the staff and the needs of the organization, resulting in the average performance of both.

• Dictatorial or Produce, Perish or Control: Similar to the autocratic leadership and leads to high turnover and high conflict. The leader focuses on production rather than employee needs.

• Sound or Team: Blake, Mouton, Gaines and Griener believed this was the most effective type of leadership. Employees consider themselves part of the team and are motivated to work as a team, which results in low turnover and an efficient organization.

• Opportunistic: Added to the model at a later date, this represents leaders who seek to benefit from situations. They use a variety of tactics to come out on top regardless of the impact to the organization.

• Paternalistic: Also added to the model later, this is a leader who will guide employees to define objectives, but only believes in executing initiatives that align with the leader’s own beliefs.

The Blake, Mouton, Barnes and Greiner Management/Leadership Grid is illustrated in Figure 1.
Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (2007) suggest four strategies that all great leaders share:

- **Strategy 1:** attention through vision
- **Strategy 2:** meaning through communication
- **Strategy 3:** trust through positioning
- **Strategy 4:** the deployment of self through (1) positive self-regard and (2) the Wallenda factor.

Bennis and Nanus held the belief that the strategies mentioned above were present in many leaders but only fully utilized by a few leaders.

Kouzes and Posner in their 2007 publication *The Leadership Challenge* propose five practices and ten commitments of leadership:
Table 1

Kouzes and Posner’s five practices and ten commitments of leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model the Way</td>
<td>1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire a Shared Vision</td>
<td>3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge the Process</td>
<td>5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovating ways to improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from the experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enable Others to Act</td>
<td>7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage the Heart</td>
<td>9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p 26)

Leadership continues to be defined, and currently the terms charismatic, moral, directive, participatory, servant, democratic leadership, as well as laissez-faire, transactional, and transformational are being utilized (Leadership-Central, 2015).

Specifics of these types of leadership will be discussed next.

**Charismatic Leadership.** Defined by a leader’s exceptional personal quality to inspire loyalty and obedience from followers, charismatic leadership is built on Max Weber’s leadership foundation about the role of the leader and followers (Weber, 1968). Leaders such as Stalin and Hitler have been described as charismatic due to their ability to create and inspire the loyalty of followers (Burns, 2003). Throughout politics and
religion there have been examples of leaders who have gained obedience by their ability to use their knowledge or special skills to gather followers.

**Moral Leadership.** Thomas Sergiovanni in his book Moral Leadership: Getting to the Heart of School Improvement (1992) presents leadership as a stewardship, a moral obligation that builds on purpose, values and beliefs. Management guru Peter Senge in his book The Fifth Discipline (1990) stated that being a leader requires you to be a steward. Senge believed the purpose of leadership was to inspire and support others, not oneself. Bass and Stodgill (2008) believe that moral leadership is connected to transformational leadership because leaders engage their followers without using power, but instead align to the overall good of the organization. Peter Block (1993) felt that stewardship was a governance strategy and that the idea of stewardship could be used to create a sense of community and purpose to organizations.

**Directive Leadership.** Leaders that utilize this type of leadership set clear objectives and rules and clearly define expectations and outcomes for followers (Bass & Stodgill, 2008). It is suggested to use this when working with an inexperienced staff, and it is the converse of participatory leadership.

**Participatory Leadership.** Leaders who focus on a participatory style of leadership ask followers to share in the decision-making process. These leaders feel comfortable in sharing their doubts, concerns, and questions, and utilize their followers to create a group problem-solving unit, which promotes a culture of mutual help, free choice, inclusion, and cooperation (Bass & Stodgill, 2008).

**Servant Leadership.** Bass and Stodgill (2008) believe servant leaders place the interests of their followers above their own. Bass and Stodgill (2008) assert that servant
leadership is more applicable in a stable leadership environment, whereas transformational leadership is relevant to changing and dynamic environments.

James Autry wrote a book entitled *The Servant Leader* (2001), which analyzed and supported a way to utilize servant leadership to support creative teams, develop great morale, and improve the bottom line. Autry proposes five ways of being associated with servant leadership:

1. Be authentic
2. Be vulnerable
3. Be accepting
4. Be present
5. Be useful

Autry believes that of all these attributes “be useful” is the most essential element of a servant leader. Serving others, the basis of servant leadership, will allow leaders to shift their focus to being a resource to their followers (Autry, 2001 p 20).

Greenleaf and Spears (2002) believe that the very essence of leadership is going ahead to show the way. They further state that a servant leader accepts and empathizes, never rejects and that we often miss leadership opportunities based on our perceptions.

**Democratic Leadership.** This type of leadership is considered to be more concerned with followers, focused on employee needs, and is consultative and participatory (Bass, 2008).

**Authoritarian Leadership.** Often considered the extreme opposite of democratic leadership, this type of leadership is considered arbitrary, controlling, power-oriented, punitive, and closed-minded (Bass, 2008).
**Laissez-Faire Leadership.** This leader is neither democratic nor authoritarian. The leader is considered withdrawn and shows a lack of concern. It results in limited influence on followers and is considered inactive (Bass and Stodgill, 2008).

**Transactional Leadership.** In the late 1970s, transactional leadership theory was introduced to support performance by providing incentives and motivation (Bass, 2008; Stone & Patterson, 2005). This type of leadership relied on an underlying theory of rewards to ensure compliance (Bass, 2008) and is one of the most widely practiced leadership styles in organizations (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Crosby (1996) suggested that this type of leadership is shortsighted, and does not take the entire organization or employees into account when creating and offering rewards for performance. The shift to transactional leadership became management by control and exchanging one thing for another from employees to employer (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership has the leader focusing on managing the day-to-day operations of the organization without focusing on overall organizational goals, or how employees can be active contributors to the success of an organization, rather than just producers of a product for an incentive (Avolio & Bass, 1999; Bass, 1985, 2008; Stone & Patterson, 2005).

As the focus of effective leadership continued to be examined it became evident that the perception of “power” and “position” of the leader was becoming obsolete and that effective leadership consisted of a more collaborative decision-making process (Burns, 1978; Stone & Patterson, 2005). This resulted in the development of transformational leadership theory by Burns, subsequently expanded upon by Bass and again by Bass and Avolio (Bass, 1985, 2008; Bass & Avolio, 1999; Burns, 1978; Leithwood, 2005; Stone & Patterson, 2005).
Transformational Leadership. Burns (1978) and Bass (2008), with their transformational and transactional theories respectively, believed that there is a philosophical dimension to leadership. “Transformational leaders transform the personal values of followers to support the vision and goals of the organization by fostering an environment where relationships are formed and by establishing a climate of trust where visions are shared” (Stone & Patterson, 2005). Bass, Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino established four dimensions that constitute transformational leadership:

1. Idealized influence (or charismatic influence),
2. Inspirational motivation,
3. Intellectual stimulation, and
4. Individualized consideration (Stone & Patterson, 2005).

A transformational leader asks followers to consider the entire organization and the organizations goals, and to be a contributor and participant in the obtainment of those goals. This commitment to the organizational objectives by followers is the primary objective of transformational leadership, and in theory will result in greater performance (Burns, 1978, Stone & Patterson, 2005, Yuki, 1998).

Burns (1978) considered transformational leadership all or nothing, meaning leaders were either transformational or transactional. Others maintain a viewpoint that leadership is a continuum, with transactional leadership on one end and transformational leadership on the other end (Sergiovanni, 2007; Stone & Patterson, 2005). Burns (1978) connects moral leadership to his transformational leadership theory, and believed that transformational leadership has a human connection and is connected to the ethics of followers. Fundamentally, transformational leadership is about creating a committed
organization of followers that put the goals and priorities of the organization first. Table 2 is a summary of the strategies and characteristics, proposed by researchers, about transformational leaders.

Table 2.

*Transformational leadership strategies and characteristics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attention through vision</td>
<td>Charisma</td>
<td>Challenging the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning through communication</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Inspiring a shared vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust through positioning</td>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>Enabling others to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployment of self</td>
<td>Individualized consideration</td>
<td>Modeling the way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 1996, as cited in Stone & Patterson, 2005)

It should be noted that neither Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, nor Stone and Patterson included the work of James Burns in their chart of transformational leadership strategies and characteristics. Burns believes that transforming leadership is an alteration of the basic system, and that to achieve such change there must be a revolution of power. Quantitative and qualitative change must exist to truly transform leadership (Burns, 2003). Leaders who transform inspire followers to work together towards common goals instead of using leadership as power over people (Burns, 2003). Bass and Stodgill (2008) believe that transformational leadership is active leadership, while transactional leadership is more indicative of laissez-faire leadership.
Leadership and Demographics

Many studies have used demographic variables such as gender, age, and educational level to predict leadership behaviors (Barbuto, Fritz, & Matkin, 2007). The variables of gender, age and educational level have been connected to effectiveness, communication style, decision making, productivity, participation, success, and power to name a few (Barbuto, Fritz, & Matkin, 2007). Additionally, though there have been many studies showing positive correlations based on these variables, there have been just as many showing negative correlations (Barbuto, Fritz, & Matkin, 2007).

Gender

Eagly and Johnson (1990) conducted a meta-analysis of gender and leadership. The 1990 study included 210 educational studies with 110 of those studies examining the leadership of educational leaders. This research supported the expectations that exist when examining leaders based on gender. These expectations included a tendency for women to lead with democratic or participatory leadership vs. men who lead with more autocratic and directive leadership. Eagly and Johnson point out that while there have been many studies regarding the relationship of leadership and gender, a majority of these studies have been performed in non-educational organizations or in experimental laboratory settings (p. 234). Additionally, these studies identified that organizational roles override gender roles. The researchers pointed out that women are often in positions of little power or with limited opportunity for advancement, and employees often have negative attitudes towards women in leadership roles (p. 235). The findings of the meta-analysis suggest that women who maintain leadership roles over time need to adopt the leadership of their male counterparts (Eagly and Johnson, 1990).
In 2003, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and van Engen examined the transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership of men and women. Their research identified that women are considered more transformational than male leaders, and that male leaders are more aligned with transactional and laissez-faire leadership. Barbuto, Fritz, and Matkin (2007), Eagly et al. (2003), and Martin (2015) argue that women favor transformational leadership as it assists women in overcoming other aspects of role identification such as allowing women to avoid being overly identified as masculine in their approach, and because the reward behaviors that are evident in transformational leadership are more aligned to women’s gender role. However, the researchers point out that there are other aspects of transformational leadership that are not gender aligned, such as the ability of leaders to instill respect and pride in the organization (Eagly et al, p 573). The Eagly et al. (2003) study measured leadership and gender under the domains of transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire. The study noted that men obtained significantly higher scores than women on the Management by Exception (active), the Management by Exception (passive), and the laissez-faire scales. This pattern was consistent over many of the studies reviewed by Eagly et al. (2003). Overall the aforementioned 2003 and 2007 studies reported that women typically align to transformational leadership. However, the studies pointed out that women are not always given the same access to leadership roles, and that further research is needed to identify the cause of the inequity.

Brooks (2009) examined the relationship between leadership, gender, and years of experience for middle school principals in North Carolina and the effect on end of grade examinations. Brook’s (2009) study reported that female principals had higher
examination gains than male counterparts. Similarly, Schoch (1996) reported that “there are significant differences in the instructional leadership behaviors of female and male principals in 3 of the 10 areas studied; communicating school goals, providing incentives for teachers, and promoting professional development”. Schoch (1996) suggests that women, by nature, are more nurturing in their relationships and therefore align better on human relation skills, and are more active in the area of instructional leadership. Additionally, women leaders, according to Schoch, promote a more positive school climate.

**Experience**

Martin, in his 2015 study, reports that a strong positive correlation existed between the number of years of administrative experience and transactional leadership. This data also correlated with age. Martin (2015) found that the older you are the most likely you will utilize transactional leadership.

In his 2013 study Pittman considered expertise/experience as acquired knowledge that has developed into fully formed competencies. Pittman also proposed that to be considered an expert, 10 years or 10,000 hours of experience are considered the minimum level to obtain optimal leadership performance. However, the results of Pittman’s 2013 study showed no significant correlation between experience and leadership.

Malcolm Gladwell in his 2008 book *Outliers* also supports the 10,000 hours theory and believes that mastery in any field cannot be obtained without it. Gladwell (2008) summarizes his research on 10,000 hours by stating, “Practice isn’t the thing you do once you’re good. It's the thing you do that makes you good” (p. 35).
In a study of elementary school leaders in South Carolina, Schoch (1992) discovered there was no significant difference in leadership behaviors based on experience. However, Schoch noted that her results might have been affected by the sample size, which did not include any principal with less than two years of principal experience.

Eagly et al. (2003) found that more experienced women leaders consider themselves transformational. Barbuto, Fritz, & Matkin, in their 2007 study, reported that the age of the leader did have a significant impact on followers and the followers desire to follow that leader. They reported that the older the leader the most likely the leader will be followed. Martin (2015), in his study of academic library leaders, determined that the multigenerational work force has different expectations of what a leader provides to an organization. Boomers prefer a leadership style that supports consensus, communication, and participation. Members of Generation X want a leader that is straightforward and fair, and Millennials appreciate authority, as long as it is polite. However, Martin reports that all of the work forces, regardless of age, select honesty as a trait that is of highest priority in their vision of a leader. “When a leader was older than members of a team, then that leader was more able to use transformational leadership, whereas a leader closer in age to the team members was not” (Martin, 2015, p. 337).

**Level of Education**

Barbuto, Fritz & Matkin found that leaders level of education had a significant effect on their follower’s perceptions. There was a significant difference in the rating for followers of leaders with only a high school education level compared to some college experience. The findings showed men had a much higher rating than women to exhibit
transformational leadership even though they only had a high school education (Barbuto, Fritz, & Matkin, 2007). Pittman (2013) states that those who are dedicated to continuous improvement have shown to have more success over time. His study proposed that the level of education of a leader contributed to a level of trust, even though their education may have been job related/imbedded vs. formal.

The majority of research connects only one variable, gender, to leadership. It should be noted that studies that connect gender, experience and educational level to leadership style are limited. Those studies that do exist produce mixed results on the significance, if any, on leadership (Barbuto, Fritz, & Matkin, 2007). “For every study that has shown differences in leadership behaviors based on gender, another has shown no differences at all” (Barbuto, Fritz & Matkin, 2007, p 1). The present study will connect the challenges and their subsequent strategies of school administrators to variables such as gender, experience and education level.

**Leadership and Educational Systems**

Leadership is one of the most complex topics in education today (Edwards, 2008). School accountability and “a response to globalization, particularly with concern for international competitiveness in trade, workforce, capacity, innovation and educational outcomes” (Starr & White, 2008, p 2) have added to the stress of school leadership (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). Schools have attempted to use corporate leadership theory to change culture, support change, and create vision (Sergiovanni, 1996).

Thomas Sergiovanni in his 1996 book *Leadership for the Schoolhouse* encourages school leaders to move away from a corporate theory of leadership. Sergiovanni (1996) suggests that school leaders “exercise their stewardship responsibilities by committing
themselves to building, serving, caring for and protecting the school” (p. xvi). There is a moral purpose to school leadership and business practices are based on a strategy of “follow me” (Sergiovanni, 1996, 2005, 2007). As a school leader you need to meet the challenge of balancing the competing needs of management and moral purpose (Sergiovanni, 2007).

Sergiovanni, in his book Moral Leadership, (1992) supported the need for leaders to create followers, not subordinates. Sergiovanni (1992) believed that subordinates follow a script of expectations that are built on strategies such as goals, policies, and objectives. To create followers, Sergiovanni (1982) proposed “leaders need to provide purpose; such as a vision, values, and norms”. Sergiovanni (1982) argues that transformational leadership theory supports schools and is applicable to school leadership. Sergiovanni (1984) suggests five dimensions of transformational leadership for schools:

- Technical leadership
- Human Leadership
- Educational Leadership
- Symbolic Leadership
- Cultural Leadership

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) consider leadership in schools no different than leadership in other organizations, and that leadership is fundamental to the successful functioning of a school (p. 5). Marzano et al.(2005) examined 69 studies looking at specific behaviors of school leadership. They identified 21 responsibilities of a school leader and related them to leadership theory of both education and business.
1. **Affirmation:** The extent a leader celebrates school accomplishments. This responsibility is associated with the behaviors exhibited by leaders who identify themselves as transactional, and it is also identified as a positive characteristic in Collins (2001) work *Good to Great* (Marzano et al., 2005, p 41).

2. **Change agent:** The leaders ability to challenge the status quo. This responsibility aligns with the characteristics of transformational leaders (Marzano et al., 2005, p 44).

3. **Contingent rewards:** This describes the leader’s ability to recognize individual accomplishments. This responsibility is associated with transactional leadership (Marzano et al., 2005, p 45).

4. **Communication:** The leader’s ability to create strong lines of communication between teachers, students, and parents. Marzano et al. believe this is a responsibility that correlates with instructional leadership and total quality management, an education and business leadership style, respectively (p 46).

5. **Culture:** Positive school culture is linked to instructional leadership and is believed to be a tool that leaders can use to support transformational change (Marzano et al., 2005, p 47).

6. **Discipline:** The leaders ability to protect teachers from unnecessary distractions (whether they are issues or influence) by allowing the teacher to focus on instruction. This responsibility is considered an element of instructional leadership (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 48).
7. Flexibility: This allows leaders to adapt their behavior based on the needs of a situation, regardless of the level of dissent (Marzano et al., 2005, p 49). This transformational leadership characteristic is supported as well by Bennis (1997), Collins (2001), Fullan (2014), and Spillane (2001).

8. Focus: The leader’s ability to establish and keep clear goals in the forefront. By effectively using this responsibility, leaders can ensure they direct energy to the school initiatives that most effectively support the goals, rather than being drawn away from them (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 50). An instructional leadership characteristic, Leithwood (2000) also supports focus as an essential leadership condition.

9. Ideals/beliefs: Bennis (1997) places ideals and beliefs at the heart of effective leadership. In a school this responsibility is evidenced when principals share their personal beliefs with faculty at the beginning of the school year (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 51). The sharing of ideals and beliefs is a responsibility that allows leaders to affect change and evidence transformational leadership practices by connecting the moral purpose to followers (Burns, 1978).

10. Input: When school leaders involve teachers in decisions around the design and implementation of policies and practices they are exercising transformational, participatory, and instructional leadership styles (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 52).

11. Intellectual stimulation: This responsibility refers to the school leader’s practice of ensuring that faculty and staff are current in learning about
practices and theories in education (Marzano et al., 2005, p 53). This transformational leadership characteristic is necessary to support the change process. Fullan (2001) considers this knowledge building. He considers this sharing, creating, and managing, and school leaders must be active participants in the experience as lead learners (Fullan, 2014).

12. Involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment: Associated with instructional leadership, this responsibility ensures that the leader is working directly with teachers in the development of curriculum and assessments, with a hands-on approach (Marzano et al., 2005, p 54).

13. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment: The leader’s ability to be current on best practices in these three areas supports the instructional leadership needs of a school (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 55). This responsibility, as viewed by Fullan (2001, 2014), refers to the need for the school leader to be able to possess extensive knowledge about these practices to ensure proper implementation in the classroom.

14. Monitoring/evaluating: John Hattie (2008) determined that the most powerful and effective instructional strategy was feedback. Feedback is the core of the monitoring/evaluating responsibility as it refers to the impact on student achievement when a leader provides feedback to teachers and monitors school practices (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 55).

15. Optimizer: School leaders who evidence this responsibility are practicing transformational leadership characteristics of inspiration for their followers (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 56). Burns (1978) believes that transformational
leaders motivate followers by providing a vision that ensures followers can achieve important goals.

16. Order: Marzano et al. consider order and structure essential elements of a smooth running school that allow the leader to focus on supporting teachers in their instructional work. This responsibility supports teachers ability to focus on their primary work, instruction, by having the leader remove barriers created by unrealistic policies (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 57).

17. Outreach: Cotton (2004) proposes that the responsibility of outreach allows the leader to build supporters by communicating with stakeholders both inside and outside the school. Kouzes and Posner (2002) refer to this responsibility as celebrations in public. They believe public celebrations create commitment and strengthen visibility of the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). However, they caution that your celebrations must be an honest expression of commitment to the values of the organization, and that they honor the hard work of the people who have supported those values (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 312). Marzano et al. (2005) see the school leader as the spokesperson and advocate for the school to the community. Outreach is even more significant in rural schools where the school is such an integral part of the community (Lock, Budgen, & Lunay, 2012).

18. Relationships: Marzano et al. (2005) determined that the relationship responsibility could be defined as the leader’s awareness about the personal lives of teachers and staff (p 58). Fullan (2001) believes that the leader’s ability to form emotional bonds with staff and teachers helps support the
entire school by creating alignment in times of uncertainty. This responsibility is in line with transformational leadership traits such as treating followers with individual consideration (Burns, 1978). Relationships create meaning and commitment; transformational leaders inspire followers by their commitment to each one as an individual (Bass and Avolio, 2002).

19. Resources: This responsibility is the foundation of a school. Without resources a school is limited in what it is capable of achieving. Fullan (2001) believes that a school is as effective as its ability to obtain resources in the area of technical support, instructional materials, equipment, space, time, and expertise (p. 64 – 65). Others believe the best investment in a school is in professional development (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 60). Regardless of the focus, the need to ensure teachers have access to the necessary resources to support student learning is the responsibility of the school leader.

20. Situational awareness: The responsibility of situational awareness shows that a leader has the ability to identify hidden problems and address and clarify concerns (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 61). Transformational leaders view their schools with both the head and the heart by using what Bennis and Nanus (2007) refer to as the deployment of self (p. 25).

21. Visibility: Visibility recognizes that it is essential for leaders to have contact and interact with teachers, students, and parents (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 61). By being visible, instructional leaders create a culture that shows the leader is interested in the daily operations of the school (Marzano et al., 2005).
Marzano et al. acknowledged that the 21 responsibilities are not new research in the area of leadership for both education and industry. However, Marzano et al. believe that in the history of leadership research they have identified a set of responsibilities that are research-based and support effective school leadership. Marzano et al. (2005) believe “the responsibilities are a significant addition to the knowledge base regarding school leadership” (p. 62). Similarly, Cotton (2004) identified 25 practices that she associated with effective school leadership.

Researchers continue to examine school leadership from a variety of perspectives. Leithwood (1994) proposed that transformational leadership is needed in education and is really a broadening of instructional leadership. Leithwood (1994) proposes leadership is really problem solving which in the educational setting equates to instructional leadership. Leithwood (2005) supports three practices on why transformational leaderships are useful in the educational setting. His model includes: 1) setting directions, 2) developing people, and 3) redesigning the organization (Leithwood, 2005). Each of the practices has subsequent dimensions that outline more specific practices and align to the context of the work of the leader in a school setting. School leadership is delivered in context unique to the role of the leader, the needs of the school, and the local and district policies. “School leadership, from both formal and informal sources, helps to shape the nature of such school conditions as goals, culture, structures, and classrooms” (Leithwood, 2005, p. 6).

Michael Fullan, in his 2003 book *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*, continued the focus on looking at the moral purpose component when examining school leadership theory and practice. Fullan (2003) supported the need to find a way to support
school leaders in developing a system where students can learn and acquire the skills they need to be successful citizens. Fullan (2003) argues that the principalship is the primary driver of the change needed in education. Fullan (2003) believes “leading schools requires principals that have the courage and capacity to build schools with agendas that go beyond test scores”.

In 1996 David Gurr argued that while transformational leadership can be a valuable theory to utilize in education at this time, modifications might be required to meet the educational needs of the future. Peter Gronn (1995) encouraged researchers to look into the work of Leithwood and Jantzi (1990, 1999, 2000) regarding the role of transformational leadership in education. Gronn proposed that the current research on the differences between transactional, transformational, and instructional leadership are incomplete.

**Rural School Leadership**

Barley and Beesley (2007), identify the central role of a rural school is to serve the community and that the school is often the major employer in the community. The school leader in a rural community is considered “public property” and on “call to the community 24 hours a day” (Lock, Budgen, & Lunay, 2012, p. 70). High turnover rates exist for a variety of reasons, such as isolation, budgets, salary, and community challenges, and the high turnover impacts the school community and leads to a lack of continuity in school planning and the ability to lead effectively (Arnold et al., 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012, Lock et al., 2012; Miller and Mid-Continent, 2004; Schuman, 2010). Meeting the daily needs of students
contributes to the stress of rural school leaders (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Starr & White, 2008; Southworth, 2004; William & Nierengarten, 2011).

Surface and Theobald (2014), noted that rural schools, while exceptionally challenging, can be powerful places to learn as the small size allows for the creating of adult/student relationships. Those relationships have been identified as being impactful in the area of accountability and school size (Surface and Theobald, 2014). They propose that schools should be small enough to allow students and adults to know each other and interact and that rural schools provide this opportunity at a greater rate than their urban counterparts (Surface and Theobald, 2014).

Recent implementation of the Common Core State Standards has added to the duties of the rural school leader as so much more is expected (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Fullan, 2014). The new role of school leaders as developers of learning communities, creators of a focus on collaborative cultures, and capacity builders is requiring school leaders to become agents of change (Dufour & Marzano, 2009; Dufour & Fullan, 2013; Fullan, 2010; Leithwood & Seashore, 2012). Arnold (2000) and Forner (2010) support the need to develop policies and strategies that support the unique contextual needs of rural schools, rather than attempt to use those strategies and policies that are designed for urban and suburban schools. Rural America is a unique context, and is subject to unique student populations (Forner, 2010). DeYoung (1987) contests that rural students are not being adequately served. DeYoung argues that this is due to the attempt to utilize urban-based models that are not appropriate to the rural setting. “Rural schools, in fact, became the primary enemy of many 19th century school reformers, who argued that politics, inefficiency and uncoordinated characteristics of rural schools could
never serve as a model for the institutionalization of public education in the U.S.” (DeYoung, 1987, p 124). Few scholars are examining rural school issues and challenges (Arnold, 2000) or rural school leadership (Arnold, 2000; Forner, 2010).

**Rural School Leadership Challenges**

Limited scholarly research exists on rural school leadership (Arnold, 2000, 2004; Arnold et al., 2005; DeYoung, 1987; Forner, 2010; Khattri et al., 1997; Lampkin, 2006). Additionally, all school leaders face challenges in implementing change, supporting reform efforts, and supporting student learning. However, based on the unique context of rural school settings, rural school leaders face additional challenges (Arnold, 2000; DeYoung, 1987; Forner, 2010; Khattri et al., 1997; Lamkin, 2006). The lack of research seems to be reflective of the urban bias that exists in most educational research in the United States (DeYoung, 1987; Forner, 2010). This lack of research places rural schools, rural leaders, and, more importantly, rural students at risk of not receiving the same level of education as their urban or suburban counterparts receive. It is evident that research to analyze rural school leadership, challenges, and strategies is needed.

**School Leadership Roles**

School leadership is categorized into three main job roles in California: superintendents, principals, and superintendent/principals (EdSource, 2007). Superintendents are the chief executive officer and are the bridge between the school board, the schools and the community. Principals serve as middle management by providing a face for the school to a community, and a bridge between teachers and parents, teachers and the community, and the school and the superintendent. Superintendent/principals are found in small rural districts and typically serve one school
district as the chief executive officer, curriculum leader, human resources manager, and site principal (EdSource, 2007).

**Superintendent Leadership**

Superintendents have a job that is full of public criticism and private moments of triumph. They lead the instructional program, manage staff and teachers, are involved with the community, handle conflict, motivate others, and are on call 24-hours a day (Houston, 2001; Lochry, 1998). Tasks such as carrying out board policy, planning, and evaluation are just some of the roles that the superintendent shoulders (Lochry, 1998). Marzano and Waters (2006) identified six common leadership traits of superintendents. They include “(a) collaborative goal-setting that includes all the district’s relative stakeholders; (b) establishing non-negotiable goals for student achievement and classroom instruction; (c) aligning board support for the district’s non-negotiable goals; (d) continuous monitoring of the district’s progress in attaining its non-negotiable goals; (e) effectively utilizing resources to support the accomplishment of district goals, and; (f) and providing autonomy to principals in clearly defined operational boundaries” (Forner, 2010, p 26). Forner, 2010, noted that Marzano and Water’s work is focused on large, urban school districts and in Forner’s opinion “was based on an operational context more consistent with that of urban and suburban schools” (p 27). Forner stated that the urban superintendent has many layers of administrative support in urban districts that is not present in rural schools (Forner, 2010).

**Principal Leadership**

The Wallace Foundation study *The School Principal as a Leader* (2011) identifies five functions that effective school principals do well: 1) Shaping a vision of academic
success for all students; 2) creating a climate hospitable to education; 3) cultivating leadership in others; 4) improving instruction; 5) and managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement. William Whyte in the 1950s considered the school principal to be the overseer of buses, boilers, and books. Principals serve in the capacity of a middle manager, and that results in their days filled with management activities such as scheduling, reporting, budgeting, parent meetings, staff and teacher evaluations in addition to handing the crises and other immediate situations that occur daily in schools (Fullan, 2003). Fullan (2003) argues that the definition of a school principal is too narrowly defined, and that the role itself is significant regarding school improvement.

**Superintendent/Principal Leadership**

In an attempt to use resources wisely, rural schools have elected to combine administrative roles by assigning a superintendent/principal as leader (Canales et al., 2008, 2010). Superintendent/principals are leading schools with limited resources, community expectations and accountability measures as the lone school leader in rural communities (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra & Angelidou, 2011; Preston et al., 2013). This combined position requires the superintendent/principal to fulfill the duties of not only the superintendent, with district responsibilities such as budgets, policy, and human resources, but also that of a site leader, with duties such as curriculum development, student activities, community activities, and student discipline (Houston, 2001). Research is needed to identify the challenges, and strategies of superintendent/principals (Canales et al.; Geivett, 2010) to provide support to rural school leaders to ensure learning for all.
Challenges of School Leaders

**Superintendent Challenges**

Superintendents, in their role, often find it challenging to balance the instructional leadership needs, day-to-day operations, needs of the community, and preferences of the school board (Ed Source, 2007). The superintendent is the only direct employee of the school board and the school board is subject to change with each election (Ed Source, 2007). The accountability for achievement of students in a district rests upon the superintendent (Forner, 2010). Lack of achievement can be perceived as a lack of skills in the area of leadership regardless of the support a superintendent may receive for implementing the necessary changes to improve student achievement (Forner, 2010; Leithwood, 1995). Accountability and pressure for enrollment, and the dollars associated with student attendance, has led to a high turnover rate and an expectation from school boards that a superintendent is a savior or superhero who can come into a district and provide a solution to any challenge (Fullan, 2002; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Hess, 1999; Forner, 2010; Leithwood, 1995; Senge et al., 2000; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

**Principal Challenges**

One of the many challenges of school principals is how to support the instructional needs at the school site. School principals understand the need to move away from managerial tasks and focus on instructional issues, but find it difficult due to the overwhelming amount of work that faces them (Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009). Finding ways to support the instructional needs of their school while managing all the other tasks is a challenge (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012). According to a 2003 Public Agenda report, 96 percent of practicing principals said their colleagues were
more helpful than their graduate studies in preparing them for the job. Two-thirds of those polled reported that their graduate course work was “out of touch” with what they needed to know (Farkas, Johnson & Duffett, 2003).

Fullan (2014) in his book *The Principal*, calls for a new role of the site leader as the lead learner, “one who models learning but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis” (p. 9). Fullan further suggests three keys to maximizing impact as a school principal. They are 1) leading learning, 2) being a district and systems player, and 3) becoming a change agent. Principals have enormous responsibilities and play a critical role in schools, but they are working in a system that is not necessarily sure what it is doing. Fullan (2014) believes principals are at a precipice of maximizing opportunity if they are willing to meet the challenge.

**Superintendent/Principal Challenges**

The dual administrative role contributes to a high degree of stress and job turnover (Canales et al., 2008, 2010). The role can be considered a stepping-stone to the next administrative position (Canales et al., 2010). Additionally, there is a lack of layers between the school board and the administrator (Lamkin, 2006). In a larger district there is a layer of one or more individuals to insulate the superintendent from local concerns, such as school site issues, so the superintendent can focus on the global issues of the district (Canales et al, 2008, 2010; Lamkin, 2006). In smaller, rural districts the layers are non-existent, which leaves the sole administrator to become a specialist in curriculum, special education, personnel, and other operational issues that are required by ever-expanding state and federal regulations (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Geivett, 2010; Lamkin, 2006; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Starr &
The need to manage the day-to-day operations of the school district and to develop the specialized instructional knowledge to support teachers in professional learning is a challenge for those leaders who lack the additional district support that which exists in larger districts.

**Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames**

Bolman and Deal (2013) created a framework to examine leadership in organizations. These four frames – structural, symbolic, human resource and political – have been used to evaluate leadership effectiveness, outcomes, and results of change, and have been used to identify leadership orientation in educational and other organizations (Bolman and Deal, 2013; Roddy, 2010; Schumacher, 2011). Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that the multiple frames allow leaders to clarify a response, make sense of situations, and encourage productive decision-making. The concept of reframing, as suggested by Bolman and Deal (2013), allows an organization to redefine situations to create new results.

Bolman and Deal (2002) believe effective school leadership requires a clear and defined frame of reality. Schools, as organizations, are complex and exist as a result of a collective human endeavor (Bolman and Deal, 2002). A critical component of school leadership is thinking before taking action (Bolman and Deal, 2002).

Schumacher (2011) utilized Bolman and Deal’s four frames to examine the shared services of educational organizations. Schumacher reported that the four frames had a perceived significance in the gathering of his data (2011, p. 71). Schumacher suggested that further research could be conducted by comparing the benefits of the four frames for shared school services in rural and suburban school settings. Specifically, Schumacher
suggests “conduct a comparative study to help identify what types of school organizations would benefit from shared services vs. a consolidation model” (p. 89). Schumacher (2011) suggests that location, size, community culture or socioeconomic status be examined, under Bolman and Deal’s four frames, to determine the usefulness of the shared services model in education.

Bolman and Deal’s four frames (2013) provide a practical lens in which to examine the identified challenges for superintendents, principals, and superintendent/principals in rural settings. The identified challenges can be categorized under Bolman and Deal’s (2013) identified frames, and can provide a lens to connect perceived strategies to the identified challenges in order to overcome them.

**Structural Frame**

The concepts associated with the structural frame are rules, roles, goals, and policies (Bolman and Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal (2013) propose there are six assumptions that are the foundation of the structural frame:

1. Organizations exist to achieve goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and a division of labor.
3. Coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
5. Structures must be designed to fit an organization’s current circumstances (including goals, technology, workforce, and environment).
6. Problems arise and performance suffers from structural deficiencies, which can be remedied through analysis and restructuring (p 45).

The structural frame is supported by two roots: first, the work of industrial analysts such as Fredrick Taylor (1911) who focused on designing organizations for maximum efficiency, and second, from Max Weber (1922) who looked closely at why organizations choose one structure vs. another (Bolman and Deal, 2013).

Utilizing the structural frame to contextualize the challenges of rural school superintendent/principals could encompass challenges such as State and Federal Mandates, accountability, board policies and procedures, as well as finance (Schumacher, 2011). Schumacher reports that a single-building district is able to operate with greater autonomy simple due to the structure of the organization.

**Symbolic Frame**

The symbolic frame examines culture, meaning, ritual and community as well as stories that are associated with an organization (Bolman and Deal, 2013). Bolman and Dean suggest the central themes of this frame are meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, belief, and faith. There are five core assumptions that Bolman and Deal (2013) identify with this frame:

1. What is important is not what happens but what it means.
2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events have multiple meanings because people interpret experience differently.
3. In the face of widespread uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, increase predictability, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
4. Many events and processes are more important for what is expressed than what is produced. They form a cultural tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories that help people find purpose and passion in their personal and professional lives.

5. Culture is the glue that holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs (pp. 242-243).

The symbolic leader is challenged to create faith and meaning through the use of symbols and culture (Bolman and Deal, 2013). Roddy (2010) states “the image of a symbolic leader is an inspirational one” (p. 43).

From the educational perspective this could include challenges in the area of community relations and the role of the administrator in the community, as well as stories and traditions (Schumacher, 2011). Schumacher suggests that cultures and expectations exist beyond the classroom and school buildings.

**Human Resource Frame**

Leaders are challenged to align organizational and human needs (Bolman and Deal, 2013). The human resource frame suggests an organizational ethic of caring and the concepts of needs, skills, and relationships (Bolman and Deal, 2013). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (1954) and McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y (1960) are cited by Bolman and Deal as major influences on this frame. The core assumptions of the human resource frame, according to Bolman and Deal (2013), are:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the reverse.

2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization, or both become victims.

4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed (p. 115). These core assumptions allow human resource leaders to lead through empowerment, which leads to leaders attempting to “align organizational and human needs” (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 16).

A challenge of rural schools is the ability to attract and retain quality teachers and staff (De Young, 1987). It is often a challenge to place the right people in the right positions when resources and qualified staff are limited (Schumacher, 2011). However, rural schools, because of their size, have the ability to create caring communities at a much faster rate than their urban and suburban counterparts (Surface and Theobold, 2014).

**Political Frame**

Bolman and Deal (2013) define politics as “the simply realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in the context of scarcity and divergent interests” (p. 181). Power is found through authority, expertise, controlling rewards, as well as personal power or characteristics (charisma, intelligence, communication skills) (Bolman and Deal, 2013). The political frame is based on five basic assumptions:

1. Organizations are coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups.

2. There are enduring differences among coalition members’ values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.

3. Most important decisions involve scarce resources.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences make conflict central to organizational dynamics and underlie power as the most important asset.

5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among stakeholders (p. 186).

Bolman and Deal (2013) propose “Organizations are both arenas for internal politics and political agents with their own agendas, resources and strategies” (p. 238). The political reality of a situation requires leaders to examine opportunities for collaboration, align values with ethical principles, and consider the importance of long-term relationships (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p. 220).

Rural schools are subject to limited resources and are greatly influenced by the politics of both their greater community and their school community (Arnold et al., 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012; Lock et al., 2012; Miller and Mid-Continent, 2004; Schuman, 2010). Schumacher (2011) found that themes emerged when utilizing this lens to examine the politics of services in schools. When considering the decision-making process, it was noted that teachers experienced more empowerment if they were part of a system larger than their classroom or building, and administrators and teachers believed that parents appreciated their children being supported by a system of services (Schumacher, 2011).

**Criteria to Analyze the Four Frames**

Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest the frames will assist leaders to navigate the uncertainty and chaos of an organization. In their 1992 work *Leading and Managing: Effects of Context, Culture and Gender*, they coded responses, using the criteria as outlined below, to compare administrators in Florida and Singapore, and discovered that
both groups of administrators used at least two frames, and that the Human Resource frame had the highest percentage of use by both groups. Florida administrators used the Human Resource frame eighty-six percent of the time and Singapore administrators ninety-eight percent of the time (Bolman and Deal, 1992). Bolman and Deal recommend the following criteria to identify issues and actions related to the four frames. Each frame in Table 3 is delineated by frame-related challenges/issues, and then the suggested actions/strategies to mitigate the challenges are listed (Bolman and Deal, 1992).

Table 3

Criteria for identifying issues and actions for the four frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Frame-related challenges/issues</th>
<th>Frame-related actions/possible strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Identity; culture; image that is perceived by different audiences (teachers, community, school board, parents; importance of existing practices or artifacts (i.e., connections to buildings; the influence of how different audiences interpret activities or decisions of the leader</td>
<td>Creating or revitalizing ceremonies or rituals; reinventing or developing a vision; influencing organizational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Clarity about goals, roles and expectations; planning; budgeting; issues about policy and procedure; coordination and control</td>
<td>Clarifying, implementing, and/or organizing policies and procedures; developing budgets or control systems, adding new processes or structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Individual feelings, needs, preferences (i.e., leaders ability to be caring and address performance issues individually, not globally); open communication; morale; collaborative decision making; sense of family/community; discussion of interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>Processes of participation and involvement; workshops, retreats, task forces; empowerment; training and recruiting of new staff; professional development/learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Frame-related challenges/issues</th>
<th>Frame-related actions/possible strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Competing interests and agendas; focus on conflict/tension between different constituencies, groups, organizations; disputes over resource allocation; games of power and self interest</td>
<td>Building alliances, networking key players; negotiation; bargaining; advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Four Frames and Education**

Bolman and Deal (2002) suggest “educational leaders are most effective when they employ practical ways of thinking in schools and classrooms” (p. 2). School leaders who can view situations from more than one angle have been known to be more effective (Bolman and Deal, 2002). Bolman and Deal go on to state: “The ability to use multiple frames has three advantages: (1) each can be coherent, focused, and powerful; (2) the collection can be more comprehensive than any single one; and (3) only when you have multiple frames can you reframe. Reframing is a conscious effort to size up a situation from multiple perspectives and then find a new way to handle it” (p. 3). Roddy (2010) reports that the multi-frame perspective has been applied in many educational settings. Bolman and Deal (2002) report that educators primarily rely on the human resource and structural frames, and then the political frame; the symbolic frame has limited reported use.

**Summary**

Fullan (2014) suggests that education in California is at a turning point with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the new era of accountability. This calls for the role of all school leaders to be further examined, but in particular the role of the superintendent/principal and the needs of rural schools need to be examined in
greater detail. Research conducted by Canales et al. (2008) supported the connection between rural school administration, leadership, teachers, and school board members in Texas. Canales et al.’s subsequent research in 2010 continued to study the relationship of leadership traits, stressors, and coping strategies of superintendent/principals in Texas. Forner et al. (2012) examined the leadership practices of seven rural superintendents and the connections to the leadership correlates of Waters and Marzano. Geivett (2010) studied the roles and responsibilities of superintendent/principals in Northern California, and suggested further research be conducted in relation to strategies as well as the specific challenges of the superintendent/principal in small rural districts. Little research exists regarding effective leadership in a rural setting and the challenges involved in the role of superintendent/principal in a rural school (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Geivett, 2010; Forner et al., 2012).

The present study will utilize a qualitative collective case study methodology to analyze the challenges and strategies of rural school superintendent/principals, and will add to the limited research on the role of the rural school superintendent/principal by identifying the challenges and subsequent strategies to support students in rural communities.

**Synthesis Matrix**

A synthesis matrix was developed to assist the researcher to determine, define, and synthesize the major components of the research. The matrix is included in Appendix A.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter will provide an overview of the methodology chosen for data collection and analysis. Included is a discussion of the research method and why it was chosen, and a summary of the data collection methods and the instruments. The population and sample will be delineated with detail about the sampling and data collection procedures. Protections are noted regarding the study participants, as well as details about the reliability and validity of the selected instrumentation. The chapter concludes with a summary of the need for further research in this area.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to identify the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the corresponding strategies used to mitigate those challenges.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the key challenges of the superintendent/principal as perceived by superintendent/principals?

2. What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges?

3. Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal?
Research Design

This study will utilize a qualitative multiple case study design to identify the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the strategies they use to mitigate them. Creswell (2005) considers case study methodology “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., an activity, event, process or individuals) based on extensive data collection” (p. 485). Baxter and Jack (2008) believe the advantage of a case study methodology is the ability of the researcher to closely collaborate with the subject, therefore allowing the participant to tell his story. Qualitative case study design provides researchers a methodology to study complex phenomena within a context (Baxter and Jack, 2008). A case study also allows the researcher to examine a specific set of individuals, organizations, schools, departments, or events (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). “Case studies are not characterized by methods used to collect or analyze data, but rather focus on a particular unit of analysis, a case” (Willig, 2008, p. 74). The intention of a multiple case study design is to understand the similarity and differences across several cases (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003).

To further support the research the Bolman Deal four frames (2003) was selected as a theoretical framework. The use of a theoretical framework provides organization for a study and guides a researcher in the interpretation of the results (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). The use of the Bolman and Deal Four Frames and the subsequent criteria to analyze the components of the frames was utilized as part of the research design.

Qualitative Study Methodology

The use of qualitative studies allows researchers to obtain a deeper understanding of an issue (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Qualitative research is concerned with opinions,
feelings, and experiences. The data gathered in qualitative research is through interviews and/or observations (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Qualitative research is described by Creswell (2005) as collecting data from participants and analyzing it for themes. Descriptive data summarizes conditions and characteristics of a particular group (Franenkel & Wallen, 2003). The use of qualitative research allows for the collection of necessary descriptive data that is not obtainable in a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2008).

**Multiple Case Study Methodology**

Yin (2003) describes multiple case studies as a methodology that allows researchers to explore differences between cases. Yin believes this methodology allows the prediction of similar results across cases and comparisons to be drawn (Yin, 2003). Yin states that multiple case studies can be used to predict similar results or predict contrasting results, based on a literal or theoretical replication, respectively. The evidence from multiple case studies is considered robust and reliable (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Stake (1995) describes case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. If you are interested in gaining insight and understanding of a particular situation or phenomena, utilize instrumental case study design; unique situations are more aligned to intrinsic studies. Multiple studies are those that involve more than one case being examined by the researcher (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather evidence about the experiences of the rural school superintendent/ principals selected for this study. Semi-structured interviews are well suited for case study research because of their flexibility to
ask follow-up questions and probe more deeply into issues (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). Superintendent/principals were interviewed regarding their challenges and the strategies they utilize to mitigate those challenges in their role as the school leader in a rural community. In addition to interviews, data referenced by the superintendent/principals such as budgets, Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP), board minutes and agendas, surveys, or other data needed for each of the participant’s school district were examined. Data provided from the sources allowed the researcher additional insight regarding challenges from the perspective of the stakeholders. The data collected was aligned to the Bolman and Deal Four Frames (2003) to categorize the challenges and subsequent strategies into a research-based model for analysis. Bolman and Deal (2002) state: “The ability to use multiple frames has three advantages: (1) each can be coherent, focused and powerful; (2) the collection can be more comprehensive than any single one; and (3) only when you have multiple frames can you reframe. Reframing is a conscious effort to size up a situation from multiple perspectives and then find a new way to handle it” (p. 3). Roddy (2010) reports that the multi-frame perspective has been applied in many educational settings.

**Population**

A population is “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010, p. 48). The population of this study was the superintendent/principals who serve as leaders in rural California schools.

More than half of all rural students in the United States attend school in just 11 states, including California (Johnson et al., 2014, p. 8). California currently has one of
the lowest percentages of rural schools and districts, one of the highest percentages of small rural districts, and has the seventh largest rural student enrollment (Johnson et al., 2014). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, of the 951 districts in California in 2011-12, 384 of them identify themselves as rural districts. In 2011-12 California had 23,140 administrators in schools statewide serving schools in the 58 counties of California (Ed Data, 2014). Currently, 102 of those administrators are identified as Superintendent/principals (Transparent, 2014). Forty-six of the 102 (45%) of the superintendent/principals in California are leading districts in the northernmost counties in California under the dual responsibilities of the role.

California is divided into eleven County Office of Education Superintendent regions. Regions 1, 2 and 3 are primarily in Northern California. According to Creswell (2005) “a target population is a group of individuals with some common defining characteristics that the researcher can identify and study.” The target population for the present study was the forty-six superintendent/principals in California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), Region 2. Three superintendent/principals from this target population, who have served four years or more in their role, were selected to be subjects of the case study.

**Sample**

A sample is “the group of subjects from whom data are collected; often representative of a specific population” (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010, p. 490). For the purpose of this study a convenience sample was collected. A convenience sample is a non-probability technique of obtaining a sample because of the accessibility and proximity to the researcher (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010).
The sample selected for this study were volunteers from the forty-six superintendent/principals listed in the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Region 2. The sample was obtained by reviewing the County Office of Education websites, and subsequent district websites, to obtain the names and email addresses of the superintendent/principals in CCSESA Region 2. Contact was made with each superintendent/principal, asking them to volunteer to be part of the study. To further delineate the sample, each volunteer was asked to provide their years of experience. Only those volunteers who had a minimum of four years of experience as a superintendent/principal were interviewed and considered qualified to participate in the case study. Each qualified volunteer was assigned a number based on this response to the call for volunteers. The researcher contacted volunteers to set up the best time for the interview. Three volunteers were interviewed.

In Northern California there are nine counties that makeup CCSESA Region 2. The nine counties that make up CCSESA Region 2 have the following enrollment and administrative demographics.

Table 4

Superintendent/Principal Data CCSESA Region 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Superintendent/ Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Butte</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31,257</td>
<td>1,474</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glenn</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5,600</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lassen</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4,794</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modoc</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1,559</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumas</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,199</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shasta</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27,173</td>
<td>1,281</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Superintendent/Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siskiyou</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5,900</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tehama</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10,694</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinity</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>90,833</td>
<td>4,389</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

Creswell (2008) suggests that data falls into four basic categories: “a) observations, b) interview, c) documents, and 4) audio visual materials” (p. 129). Nancy Mellon (1998) states “Because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability of all human beings, even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results” (p. 174). Interviews, when conducted well, can provide insight into the perspectives of the study participants, and can discover unique differences in their stories (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). After approval from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (IRB), an email was sent to each participant providing an introduction to the researcher, details about the purpose of the study, and an invitation to participate in the interview process. Included, as an attachment to the email, was the Informed Consent document. Interview questions were developed by the researcher, based on research findings from the literature review, to address each of the research questions. Creswell (2005) believes that interview data collection allows the researcher to explore characteristics of a case. The literature review supported the need to conduct additional research on the role of the superintendent/principal, as limited research has been conducted to address this dual responsibility role (Geivett, 2010). The literature review, as outlined in Appendix A, identified several challenges that are associated with the superintendent/principal position and the interview prompts were aligned with these
identified challenges. Additionally, follow-up questions were asked during the interview process to ensure clarity and understanding of the responses. The interviewer recorded the interviews, and the recordings were made available to the participant upon request.

**Field Test – Reliability**

The interview questions were field-tested for reliability by a current rural school superintendent/principal who had served one year in the role and was not part of the study. Furthermore, an unbiased observer was present during the interview to document the behaviors of the interviewee. The unbiased observer provided feedback to the researcher on item clarity and bias. The field-test participant was questioned following the interview for clarity of questions, bias and clarity of follow-up questions. Additionally, the field test participant’s data was coded and themed. The coded and themed data was reviewed by a second reader for validation. The field test participant reviewed the collected data to ensure that the researcher’s interpretation was correct. The field-test participant’s responses were cross-referenced to existing literature to validate that the responses received were consistent with other research findings. The feedback from the field tests was utilized to make necessary modifications to the interview questionnaire.

**Validity**

Baxter and Jack (2008) suggest the following steps to ensure the validity and credibility of collected data: a) the research questions are clearly written, b) the case study design is appropriate for the research questions, c) purposeful sampling strategies that align with the case study design are utilized, d) data is collected and managed utilizing a systemic approach, and e) data is analyzed correctly. The researcher created a
matrix as a result of the literature review to identify the challenges associated with the role of superintendent/principal. This matrix, located in Appendix A, allowed the researcher to establish content validity by cross-reference content of the interview questions and prompts with the challenges identified in the literature review.

Baxter and Jake (2008) also suggest that researchers institute a process of “member checking”. Member checking suggests that the researcher’s interpretation of the data is shared with the participants, and the participants then discuss and clarify the researcher’s interpretation of the data (Baxter and Jake, 2008).

Another recommendation to ensure validity of the research is to have a double coding process for data analysis (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This double coding process involves the researcher coding the data once, and then after a period of time returning to the same data, coding it again, and comparing the results of the two coding sessions (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Data Collection

Multiple data sources add to the credibility of the data collected in a case study (Baxter and Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). Yin and Stake emphasize the importance of organizing data to help the researcher from becoming lost in the data collected.

Once the researcher obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval the following data collection process was initiated:

1. The researcher gathered contact information (email) from district websites for CCSESA Region 2 Superintendent/Principals.

2. The researcher sent an email to identified contacts with an introduction and a request to schedule an interview. Included in the email request was an
Informed Consent form, an explanation of the intent of the study, and the length of the interview.

3. The researcher contacted interview volunteers via email or telephone to arrange an interview time.

4. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, either face-to-face or via telephone or electronic media (i.e., Skype, Google Hangout, email). The interview consisted of interview questions to obtain demographic information, to identify challenges, and also asked the participant how they mitigate the perceived challenges. The interview took 1 hour. Prior to the interviews a written Informed Consent form was offered. If the participant refused to provide consent the interview was terminated.

5. Data collected from the interviews was coded and analyzed by the researcher.

6. The archived data sources such as the district Local Control Accountability Plan, board agendas, and meeting agendas were reviewed to provide additional insight on challenges and the stakeholder’s input. This data was cross-referenced to the interview responses to provide additional data for the case study from the perspective of the district stakeholders.

**Data Analysis**

The interview data was transcribed and coded/themed (Creswell, 2003, 2008). Research questions 1 and 2 focused on the challenges faced by superintendent/principals and the strategies utilized to mitigate these challenges. Research question 3 gathered demographic data and allowed for the correlation of identified challenges and strategies to those demographics. The data collected regarding the challenges and the strategies of
rural school superintendent/principals was further aligned to using the Bolman and Deal four frames (2003).

Table 5

*Indicators for Coding Narrative Accounts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Frame-related challenges/issues</th>
<th>Frame-related actions/possible strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Identity; culture; image that is perceived by different audiences (teachers, community, school board, parents; importance of existing practices or artifacts (i.e., connections to buildings; the influence of how different audiences interpret activities or decisions of the leader)</td>
<td>Creating or revitalizing ceremonies or rituals; reinventing or developing a vision; influencing organizational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Clarity about goals, roles and expectations; planning; budgeting; issues about policy and procedure; coordination and control</td>
<td>Clarifying, implementing, and/or organizing policies and procedures; developing budgets or control systems; adding new processes or structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Individual feelings, needs, preferences (i.e., leaders ability to be caring and address performance issues individually, not globally); open communication; morale; collaborative decision making; sense of family/community; discussion of interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>Processes of participation and involvement workshops, retreats, task forces; empowerment; training and recruiting of new staff; professional development/learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Competing interests and agendas; focus on conflict/tension between different constituencies, groups, organizations; disputes over resource allocation; games of power and self interest</td>
<td>Building alliances; networking key players; negotiation; bargaining; advocacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bolman and Deal, 1992)
Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest frames assist leaders to navigate the uncertainty and chaos of an organization. Using the indicators outlined by Bolman and Deal (2013), and delineated in table 5, allows the researcher to make reasonable judgments about the presence of the frames from the interview responses and the additional archived documents (Bolman and Deal, 1992).

The researcher sought the services of a third party consultant to review the codes and themes to ensure the quality and effectiveness of them, in an attempt to eliminate bias and over-analysis of data (Creswell, 2008). Intercoder reliability allows researchers to develop valid theories that emerge from the data (Kurasaki, 2000). Ensuring adequate intercoder reliability assesses the reliability of the coding and establishes credibility to the qualitative findings (MacPhail, Khoza, Abler & Ranganathan, 2015).

**Limitations**

All studies are subject to limitations. The limitations of this study include the following:

1. The study was limited to the forty-six superintendent/principals in the northernmost region of California who volunteered to participate.
2. The collection of data was limited to a single time frame.
3. The data collected was based on the self-reported perceptions of the superintendent/principals.

**Summary**

The research method and design were discussed in this chapter. A qualitative collective case study approach was selected because it allowed the researcher to gain an
in-depth understanding of the challenges and perceived strategies of rural school superintendent/principals.

Included in the discussion in Chapter 3 was a review of the purpose of the study and the research questions. A summary of the selected instrumentation, the data analyses, as well as the intended population and sample were described. The limitations of the study were delineated. Subsequent chapters will provide detailed sections on data collection, coding, themes, data analysis, and the results of the study.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

The role of a school administrator is complex; however, the role of a superintendent/principal in a rural area is even more so. Research on the role of a superintendent/principal is limited. This administrator, who has to be all things to all people, fulfills a unique role in a small school district. The need is great to gain a better understanding of how to provide support to those administrators who serve in this unique role with its unique challenges.

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative case study by organizing the data from the three superintendent/principals who participated in the interview process. The data is organized around the three research questions and identifies themes and patterns that emerged. The themes are then connected to Bolman and Deal’s Four frames. Demographic data is also presented about the interviewees who participated in the study. The chapter includes a restatement of the purpose statement and research questions, a summary of the population and sample, a description of the interview participants and their districts, a description of the data collection process, a detailed presentation of the themes and patterns, an alignment of the themes and patterns to Bolman and Deal’s Four frames, and a summary of the key findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the corresponding strategies used to mitigate those challenges.
Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study. The first two were developed to identify the challenges and subsequent strategies of rural school superintendent/principals, and the final question identified if any differences exist based on the demographic characteristics of the study participants.

4. What are the key challenges of the superintendent/principal as perceived by superintendent/principals?

5. What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges?

6. Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized a qualitative case study method of research. Yin believes this methodology allows the researcher to explore differences between cases and predict similar results across cases so comparisons can be drawn (Yin, 2003). This study was conducted to learn about the challenges and strategies used to mitigate those identified challenges of rural school superintendent/principals, and to determine if these challenges differ by gender, years of experience, and level of education. Semi-structured interviews were selected for this study because they are well suited for case study research because of their ability to ask follow-up questions to probe more deeply into the issues (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The questions used to create the interview script (see Appendix B), which guided each semi-structured interview, were created based on the research
presented in the study. Each interview was conducted so that any necessary follow-up questions could be asked if the researcher deemed them necessary.

The data collected was then coded and analyzed for themes and patterns. This process allowed the data to speak for itself without pre-determined codes. The data collected was subsequently aligned to the Bolman and Deal Four frames (2003) to categorize the challenges and subsequent strategies into a research-based model for analysis. Bolman and Deal (2002) state:

The ability to use multiple frames has three advantages: (1) each can be coherent, focused and powerful; (2) the collection can be more comprehensive than any single one; and (3) only when you have multiple frames can you reframe. Reframing is a conscious effort to size up a situation from multiple perspectives and then find a new way to handle it (p. 3).

Roddy (2010) reports that the multi-frame perspective has been applied in many educational settings.

**Population**

A population is “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 48). The population of this study was the superintendent/principals who serve as leaders in rural California schools.

The target population for the present study was the forty-six superintendent/principals in the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), Region 2. County Office of Education websites were examined by the researcher and contact information obtained. Those districts that no longer identified a
role of superintendent/principal were removed from the list. The researcher also contacted County Office of Education personnel to narrow the list to only those superintendent/principals that might be willing to participate in the study. An introductory email was sent with an overview of the study and an explanation of why the superintendent/principal had been selected to receive an invitation. Three attachments were included with the email: a) the full research study invitation (see Appendix C), b) an informed consent form (see Appendix D) and a copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix B)

Sample

A sample is “the group of subjects from whom data are collected; often representative of a specific population” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 490). For the purpose of this study a convenience sample was collected. A convenience sample is a non-probability technique of obtaining a sample because of the accessibility and proximity to the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The sample selected for this study was three volunteers from the forty-six superintendent/principals listed in the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Region 2. To obtain this sample, the research reached out to county offices of education via email and social media to help gather names of those superintendent/principals who met the years of experience requirement to participate in the study.

To further delineate the sample, each volunteer was asked to provide his/her years of experience, gender and level of education. Qualitative research is designed to use smaller sample sizes to gain more detailed information about participants (Creswell,
Additionally, multiple case study design can be used to predict similar or contrasting results, based on literal or theoretical replication, respectively (Yin, 2003). Yin also states “the typical criteria regarding sample size is irrelevant in multiple-case design” (Yin, 2003, p 59). Instead, Yin (2003) suggests that sample size should be a reflection of the number of case replications both literal and theoretical and is a matter of discretionary judgment and choice of the researcher.

The sample for this study is three superintendent/principals who provided their informed consent and agreed to be interviewed. These three participants were selected to illustrate the similarities and differences in identified challenges and perceived strategies based on years of experience, gender, and level of education. Of the three, one was female and two were male. The years of serving as a superintendent/principal were four years to 13 years. Enrollment for the participants varied from 114 – 201 students. All three participants were principal/superintendents of school districts in Northern California CCSESA Region 2 in K-8 districts. Table 6 displays the participant information for the three participants. Each participant was numbered in order by date and time of their interviews. Because the study is anonymous, neither the name of the participant nor the school district is identified.

Telephone interviews were conducted with the three candidates at a time and location selected by the interviewee. Verbal permission to record the interview was obtained at the start of each interview session. Each participant was asked identical questions. As probed by the researcher, in an attempt to gain clarification, the participants would sometimes explore topics beyond the scope of the research questions. These items were often included in the recording as they added depth and breadth in
understanding the superintendent/principal role. The transcribed interview was shared with each superintendent/principal for review and comment prior to inclusion in the study. None of the participants requested changes to the interview transcript.

Table 6

Participant Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Participant Number</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of administrative Experience</th>
<th>Years of experience as a superintendent/principal</th>
<th>Level of district</th>
<th>District Enrollment</th>
<th>Level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>K-8</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Field Test

A field test was conducted in order to assess whether the questions used in the interview protocol properly addressed the research questions, to ensure that the suggested timeframe was appropriate, to determine if the technology used to record the interviews was reliable, and if the research properly coded and categorized the interview responses. The subject interviewed for the field test was not used as part of the sample for this study. The field test subject was a superintendent/principal who has served in that role for 2 years and has a total 11 years of administrative experience.

Based on the feedback given by the subject at the end of the field test, and after a subsequent review of the transcript and the coded responses, it was determined that the questions designed by the researcher were adequate in gathering the desired information for this study and properly addressed the research questions. The researcher also determined that the hour time frame was adequate and the technology to record the
interviews was reliable. Additionally, the field test participant agreed with the researcher’s coding of their responses.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section provides a synthesis and analysis of the responses in a narrative format, organized by research question, and includes the themes as they emerged.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: What are the key challenges of the superintendent/principal as perceived by superintendent/principals? The question was stated to the participants in the interview as follows:

*Regarding challenges in your role as a superintendent/principal in a rural school–Tell me about some of the most significant challenges that you have experienced?*

This section presents the participants’ responses to Question 1 by theme. Three themes emerged from the participant’s responses to this question: complexity of the job, staffing, and enrollment. The frequency of references and source data coded to these themes is found in Table 7.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of the Job</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Complexity of the job.* All three participants indicated the overwhelming complexity of the job as the most significant challenge they experience, and this emerged
as one of the strongest themes. The ability to separate yourself to complete the two roles, and complete them equally, is by far the most difficult challenge all of them experienced. Canales et al. (2008, 2010) reported that the dual administrative role contributes to a high degree of stress and job turnover.

**Superintendent vs. Principal Duties.** Participant two spoke of how “easy it is to let the superintendent duties override the principal duties”. All the participants expressed difficulty in being an expert in so many areas. Participant one stated it as “It is really hard to develop the in-depth knowledge and skill to be sufficiently familiar with everything and there is a steep learning curve, especially when you are the one looked to for all the answers. I truly am the jack of all trades.” All three participants commented on the difference between having a cabinet and directors and/or assistant superintendent staff vs. having to know it all. Participant one shared a story of a fellow superintendent of a large district commenting that she wouldn’t know how to do her job if she didn’t have the staff she did have who know all the answers so she didn't have to.

Board agendas, School Site Council agendas, staff meeting agendas, and board minutes were reviewed to gain an understanding of the complexity of the job of a superintendent/principal. In the review of these documents it was noted that the principal/superintendent was directly involved in leading the meeting or was a major participant in the agenda of the meeting.

According to Edwards (2008) leadership is one of the most complex topics in schools today. Meeting the daily needs of students contributes to the stress of rural school leaders (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Starr & White, 2008; Southworth, 2004; William & Nierengarten, 2011). Canales et al. (2008, 2010) and Lampkin (2006) agreed that
managing the school site issues, a job typically performed by the principal, and the global district issues, typically handled by a superintendent, are difficult when there is only one administrator.

**Legal Mandates.** Participant one commented that the legal mandates alone are crushing and the smaller schools are often forgotten. He shared a recent experience regarding contract law. Participant one shared “Luckily, I had some experience with a larger district and could advocate my case. Others may not know that what they were asking was impossible in a rural area” The changes that were proposed to the bid process would have made it impossible for him to get a construction job done on-site because of associated regulations. The participant directed the researcher to postings on the Small School District (SSDA) website and the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) Legal Briefs to substantiate this challenge.

In the January/February SSDA newsletter there were several articles that discussed different mandates and how they affected rural schools. One article was on low-emission school bus regulations, another on the use of Proposition 39 funding, and a third on requirements in the area of school safety. All three articles had references to rural schools. The ACSA website had articles related to a court filing, Robles-Wong v State of California. This litigation focuses on funding and the relationship to educational quality for schools. The results of this case, as outlined by ACSA, would impact a schools ability to provide the same education to all students regardless of state appropriated funding levels.

In a larger district there would be one or more individuals that would serve as experts on the ever-expanding state and federal regulations; those experts become the
superintendent/principal in a small rural district (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Geivett, 2010; Lamkin, 2006; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Starr & White, 2008).

**Redundancy of forms and required paperwork.** The participants expressed frustration in the redundancy of having to comply with reporting regulations for both a school and a district. For example: completing the Local Control Accountability Plan (district) and the Single School Plan (school). Participant three stated “*she sometimes doesn’t complete the school level plans simply because of lack of time and the redundancy of the reporting*”.

The California Department of Education website was examined to review school vs. district reporting requirements, as well as school and district reports such as the Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAP), Local Educational Agency Plans (LEAP), and School Site Plans in order to substantiate this challenge. Currently, there is no combined document that will allow a small school district to eliminate redundancy. It was determined, in a review of State Board of Education minutes, that there is some consideration to combine the LCAP and the LEAP, but no official document has been created (CDE, 2015). Additionally, the respective requirements LCAP and LEAP were examined to confirm that similar data is expected to be submitted in both documents.

The research of Canales et al. (2008, 2010), Geivett (2010), Arnold (2000), Forner, (2010), and Lamkin (2006) agree that the unique context of rural schools and rural school leaders needs to be addressed.

**District size.** When discussing the rural location and enrollment size of the districts all the participants commented that small was small even if they have a larger
community close by. Participant three stated “No matter what the size of your school, the state and federal demands are the same; we just don’t have anyone to share the workload with.” Participant one summarized this theme as “I, as the district/school leader, still have to provide an adequate level of service, regardless of my school size and staff. Sometimes the limit on the number of hours in a day doesn’t give me an opportunity to do that.” Enrollment figures for each superintendent/principal were examined over the last five years and are outlined in table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Surface and Theobald (2014) noted that rural schools, while exceptionally challenging, can be powerful places to learn because the small size allows for the creation of adult/student relationships. Additionally, the learning outcomes of smaller schools are greater because of the ability to create relationships (Surface and Theobald, 2014).

**Staffing.** In the area of staffing all of the participants reported this as a challenge. However, only one identified the challenge as significant, and the staffing challenges differed by participant. For participant one it was the ability to retain staff that had to drive to a rural location, often miles from their home, for less pay and hours. Participant one reported that his struggle is keeping staff for his afterschool program that is an integral part of his school as it provides needed support for students in his rural community while parents are at work, which he felt was significant. “It is difficult for me to retain staff due to the distance of my school site from a close city” ~ participant one
Participant two shared that he had to take over as the 8th grade teacher for half the year last year in order to fill an open position. However, participant two identified that he felt he would rather “take over teaching a class than hire a sub-standard teacher”.

School board agendas, board meetings, and job postings were examined to substantiate this challenge. The researcher, when examining job postings, compared the salaries for the afterschool aide position between two districts. It was determined that another more suburban district in the same county paid about $2.00 more per hour than the rural district.

Canales et al. (2008, 2010) consider this need for the superintendent/principal to serve multiple roles, and the distance of rural schools from major communities as a challenge. According to Canales et al. (2012) and Geivett (2010) the superintendent/principal may serve as a classroom teacher in addition to his other duties.

Participant three had another staffing challenge regarding her school board. She has a three-member school board and when a member retires she has difficulty finding replacements to run for the office. She shared that she begged one of her board members to stay on until their grandchild graduated from eighth grade so he could be on stage to give her a diploma. That grandchild graduates this school year and participant three doesn’t know whom she will be able to find to replace that board member. Election rosters and school board, as well as current member terms of the board, were examined to substantiate this challenge. The current school board consists of three members, most of whom have served at least two terms in office. Participant three also shared that she has one of the only three member boards in the county. While this challenge was not specifically addressed in the research, Lamkin (2006) did identify that the lack of layers
between a school board and the site administrator can be a challenge in rural communities.

**Enrollment.** When considering this theme, the researcher noted that only one participant, participant three, referenced this as a challenge. This challenge surfaced as a result of a probing a question regarding staffing, and was more of a side note than a substantial challenge. Participant three stated her challenge was one of having too many students and the difficulty of turning away families because of the lack of classroom space. In fact, her board has had to adopt a priority list for students to determine who does and doesn’t make it on a class list. Participant two shared that “if she went to her cafeteria manager and told her they were having just one more student she would probably be strung up the flag pole” we just don’t have space to prepare food or feed one more student.

The researcher reviewed school board policy and board agendas and determined that being a graduate of the school and/or having a family member that attends the school placed families at a higher rank on the priority list than other families. The research of Surface and Theobald (2014) supports the positive impact of small school size but not the issue of having to keep a school small due to lack of space or teachers.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was: What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges? The question was stated to the participants in the interview as follows:

*Of the challenges we have discussed, what strategies/tools have you utilized to minimize those challenges?*
This section presents the participant’s responses to Question 2 by theme. Three themes emerged from the participant’s responses to this question: shared leadership, shared expertise, and job definition. The frequency of references and source data coded to these themes is found in Table 9.

Table 9

Codes and Frequencies for Research Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Number of References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared Leadership</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Expertise</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Definition</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shared Leadership. This theme captures the idea that the superintendent/principals share the workload with other staff members. Two participants used this term as a strategy to mitigate challenges.

Participant one has hired additional clerical staff to take on some of the duties that he used to perform. It should be noted that he only works an 80% contract effective this school year as he moves towards retirement. “I felt the best way to distribute some of my duties was to hire extra clerical staff to manage what I consider clerical tasks”~ participant one

Participant one hopes that by distributing the duties to clerical staff he can move his district away from a full-time superintendent/principal and instead share a superintendent/principal with another district. He has developed his three-year budget proposal with the idea of a multidistrict shared superintendent/principal role upon his retirement. The researcher reviewed board agendas and budgets to substantiate this solution. The three-year projected budget and board minutes supported the plan to share duties with another small district when the current superintendent/principal retires.
Participant three commented that she tries to develop teacher leaders and provide teachers with opportunities to learn beyond their classroom. However, she cautions that she uses this strategy on a very limited basis, as she is concerned about overwhelming an already hard-working teaching staff. As a superintendent/principal she is passionate about student learning and wants to ensure that student learning is the priority for her district, even if it means she does the brunt of the work on any project. Staff agendas were reviewed to substantiate this challenge and it was noted that the superintendent/principal was the leader of the meetings, but other staff members were included to speak on other topics such as testing, curriculum, fundraisers, and afterschool activities.

**Shared Expertise.** This theme refers to the strategy of using their peers to help mitigate the challenge of having to know it all and to overcome the feeling of loneliness that all the participants reported was part of the job. All three participants identified a strategy of shared expertise.

All three discussed their monthly superintendent meetings held by their County Superintendents of Schools. Each participant referenced the support they receive by meeting with fellow superintendents. It should be noted that each participant reported different support from their County Office of Education overall and that there was no difference in support for those that serve as the superintendent/principal and those that serve as superintendents with a large staff. Participant two felt that the support from his County Office has decreased over the years but the support he has gained by reaching out on his own to his fellow superintendent/principals is extremely valuable. County Office of Education websites, specifically the calendar section, was examined to review the meeting schedules and services offered to districts. One county offered regular monthly
superintendent meetings; the others had meetings quarterly. One county also provided workshops in areas of interest such as legal briefings, LCAP workshops, and budget forums. However, those workshops were not specifically delineated for small schools.

Participant one shared that the six superintendent/principals in his county get together informally prior to the county superintendent’s meeting to support each other. However, the strategy that participant one reported is most effective for him was the willingness of his fellow superintendent/principals to share their expertise. He stated: “Instead of me having to be an expert in data and assessment, one of my fellow superintendent/principals takes on that role and comes to my school and trains my staff. I, in turn, have lots of knowledge about construction and the bid process. I have supported her when she needs it for her modernization projects.”

**Job Definition.** This theme of job definition references the mental processes that two of the participants use to mitigate their challenges. This theme was the most surprising to the researcher and was the most used strategy, as well as the most recommended by the participants.

Participant three believes that she finally feels, this school year, that she has a handle on the job by applying a mental strategy. During the interview she commented that she thought I might find it “silly” but for her it is what has made the biggest difference in mitigating the overwhelming amount of work associated with the job. “I literally tell myself what role I am in today at that moment. For example: an hour ago I was in classrooms working with teachers. Before I walk in I mentally tell myself you are the principal. This afternoon I will be working on the board packet and budgets. Again, I have to mentally tell myself now you are the superintendent. It has made the biggest
difference for me as a leader and has given me the permission to not have to be both things at the same time. When I first started this job I felt I had to be both roles simultaneously; that was impossible. It only took me three years to figure it out. If I could pass on one strategy, this mental permission slip would be it.”

To combat the complexity of the job participant number two has a simple rule. “When students and staff are on campus, I am the principal. When students and staff leave, I am the superintendent.” Participant two says it is not a hard and fast strategy, as things come up, but the one that he relies on the most and is passionate about committing to.

**Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 was: Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal? The question was stated to the participants in the interview as follows:

- *How many years have you been a school administrator?*
- *How many years have you been in your current position?*
- *What is your level of education?*

The superintendent/principal participants varied in years of experience, from four to 13 years, and served K-8 districts. One female and two males participated in the study. Each of the participants held a master’s degree for their highest level of education. Table 6 displays the participant information for the three participants.

In review of the data no evidence or themes presented themselves that any demographic data contributed to the challenges presented or the strategies utilized.

Participant two stated it best: “The requirements are the same for a large district or a
small district, for a new superintendent or an experienced one. However, some things impact a smaller district more just because of economies of scale”.

Studies are limited that connect gender, experience, and educational level to leadership, and those that do exist connect only one variable, gender. “For every study that has shown differences in leadership behaviors based on gender, another has shown no differences at all” (Barbuto, Fritz & Matkin, 2007, p. 1).

**Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames**

Bolman and Deal (2013) created a framework to examine leadership in organizations. These four frames – symbolic, structural, human resource, and political – have been used to evaluate leadership effectiveness, outcomes, and results of change, and have been used to identify leadership orientation in educational and other organizations (Bolman and Deal, 2013; Roddy, 2010; Schumacher, 2011). Bolman and Deal (2002) believe effective school leadership requires a clear and defined frame of reality. Schools, as organizations, are complex, and exist as a result of a collective human endeavor (Bolman and Deal, 2002).

The data, both interview and archival, identified by this study are categorized into Bolman and Deal’s four frames. The data collected was then compared to the strategies suggested by Bolman and Deal for alignment. Interview data, archival evidence and the Bolman and Deal definitions are delineated in Table 10.

**The Symbolic Frame.** This frame focuses on meaning, belief, and how to make sense of chaos and ambiguity (Bolman & Deal, 2013). According to Bolman and Deal (2013) “Leaders are bricoleurs, people who survey and use the materials at hand to
construct meaning systems” (p. 244). They further state that the “the way we do things around here,” or our own cultural ways, are often invisible to us.

Bolman and Deal suggest that organizations can be judged on appearance as much as outcomes. Bolman and Deal caution leaders from falling back to repeating old behaviors, and point out that it often leads to helplessness. They suggest that leaders create a community of believers in a shared culture as this leads to peak performance (Bolman and Deal, 2013).

**The Structural Frame.** Bolman and Deal (2013) consider this frame the oldest way to think about organizations, the structure or organizational chart. This organizational structure was first created by industrial analysts such as Fredrick Taylor in 1911 and then expanded on by others, e.g., Fayol in 1919 and Urwick in 1937 (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This structure allows us to identify expectations between the internal (employees, managers) and the external (customers) (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal (2013) compare the building’s framework to a skeleton and recognize that the structural form both enhances and constrains an organization.

The participants identified the complexity of the job as a challenge. They recognized the complexity of having to fill two district roles, that of a superintendent and that of a principal. The structure of those roles aligns with what Bolman and Deal consider the forms and functions of an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal further suggest that there are two issues that are central to the structural frame: how to allocate work and how to coordinate diverse efforts. The division of tasks is the keystone of this frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013) and the strategy of using shared expertise and defining their job are identified as strategies that would align to this frame.
The Human Resource Frame. The center of this frame is about what organizations and people do to each other and for each other (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This frame is built on core assumptions such as: a) organizations serve human needs, b) people and organizations need each other, c) when a fit between an organization and people is poor both suffer and when it is good both benefit (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal (2013) recognize several human resource strategies that they define as good people management. Some examples are invest in learning, reward well, provide information and support, encourage autonomy and participation, and foster self-managing teams (p. 140).

The strategies identified by the participants, such as shared leadership and shared expertise, align with Bolman and Deal’s suggestions that progressive organizations implement several “high involvement strategies” to improve human resource management. Bolman and Deal (2013) also recognize that an individual’s social skills are a critical element in effective work relationships, and that rather than ignoring interpersonal dynamics, a model can be built on the values of mutual learning.

The Political Frame. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that the political frame be viewed as the heart of decision-making, and it is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources. This frame views organizations as hosting contests around individual and group interests that are summarized as follows (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 188 -189):

- Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and groups.
- Coalition members have differences in values, beliefs, information, interests and perceptions of reality.
• The most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources.

• Scarce resources and differences put conflict in the center of day-to-day dynamics.

• Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation.

Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that in a school district the teachers union may be more dominant that the school board or superintendent. Furthermore, they suggest that politics can be destructive or a vehicle to achieve a noble purpose (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Table 10

Findings inside Bolman and Deal’s Frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbolic Frame</th>
<th>Definition: Identity; culture; image that is perceived by different audiences (teachers, community, school board, parents; importance of existing practices or artifacts (i.e., connections to buildings; the influence of how different audiences interpret activities or decisions of the leader.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Data</td>
<td>“It is really hard to develop the in-depth knowledge and skill to be sufficiently familiar with everything and there is a steep learning curve, especially when you are the one looked to for all the answers. I have been a basketball coach, classroom teacher and sometimes think I should learn how to bus. My overall community has seen me as a man who can do many roles. I truly am the jack of all trades” ~ participant one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My school is not really in a formal community but was created originally as a school to serve families in a farming area. What that means is that most of my parents identify with the large community that is located within minutes of my school site. If you can imagine, I am school that was placed in the middle of a section of fields” ~ participant two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“When I first started this job I believed I could be all things to all people. I realize now that I have to be very strategic on what I become involved with.” ~ participant three</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Archival Data

2015 LCAP ~ participant one
- Improve community involvement with school but adding events to both the school website and local community billboards. A goal was also written to improve the school visibility by increasing the number of parents and community members attending school events by 2%. To achieve this goal the school will host more community events on the school site.

School Website Calendar ~ participant one
- Evidence of community events being held at school i.e. Mexican dinner, movie night, grandparents day

February 2016 School Newsletter – community events ~ participant two
- Book fair and family school night
- Choir visit to Veterans memorial
- Fire Department fund raising dinner

2015 LCAP ~ participant two
- Utilize communication software to improve the frequency of school home communication
- Annual survey to access parents, staff and students needs and perceptions

EL parent meeting agendas (August and May) ~ participant two
- Input sessions and celebrations

2015 LCAP and daily bulletins ~ participant three
- School pride nomination and recognition
- Student input on activities (spirit days, field games)
- Staff expectation of positive student greetings
- Identify resources for families in the community
- Maintain communication with families regarding behavior, attendance and academics

2014 LCAP and school website ~ participant three
- Translated school documents available to all parents

January 2016 school website - community events ~ participant three
- 4-H fundraiser dinner
- Blood drive
- “Soup Bowl Saturday”
- Family receiving donation from local organization after a fire destroyed their home

(continued)
**Structural Frame**

Definition: Clarity about goals, roles and expectations; planning; budgeting; issues about policy and procedure; coordination and control.

**Interview Data**

“I, as the district/school leader, still have to provide an adequate level of service, regardless of my school size and staff. Sometimes the limit on the number of hours in a day doesn’t give me an opportunity to do that.” ~ participant one

“To combat budget issues I decided to go part time this year. Since that seems to be working I have created a three-year budget projection with the intent of part time superintendent/principal. I also hired more clerical staff to take on some of the traditional principal tasks to allow me to focus on priorities.” ~ participant one

“I work hard to develop teacher leaders, however I am also concerned that by taking teachers out of the classroom I am not focusing on what should be the priority, student learning.” ~ participant three

“Instead of me having to be an expert in data and assessment, one of my fellow superintendent/principals takes on that role and comes to my school and trains my staff. I, in turn, have lots of knowledge about construction and the bid process. I have supported her when she needs it for her modernization projects.” ~ participant one

**Archival Data**

2015 LCAP and daily bulletin ~ participant one
- Add breakfast and lunch offerings in the school cafeteria to support student learning

2014 LCAP and budget ~ participant one
- Add wireless access to school, update and purchase computers

2015 LCAP and budget ~ participant two
- Upgrade wireless network

2014 LCAP and budget ~ participant two
- Purchase of 40 chrome books
- Report cards and progress reports aligned to standards

2014 Board minutes~ participant two
- Board review of instructional materials and approved the purchase of additional needed materials to support math and English learners.
Archival Data

2015 LCAP and behavior matrix ~ participant three
- Positive behavior interventions
- Communication with staff about disciplinary actions

2014 LCAP and budget ~ participant three
- Purchase of 23 Chromebooks and 10 iPads

Human Resources Frame

Definition: Individual feelings, needs, preferences (i.e., leaders ability to be caring and address performance issues individually, not globally); open communication; morale; collaborative decision making; sense of family/community; discussion of interpersonal relationships.

Interview Data

“No matter what the size of your school, the state and federal demands are the same; we just don’t have anyone to share the workload with.” ~ participant three

“It is difficult for me to retain staff due to the distance of my school site from a close city” ~ participant one

“I felt the best way to distribute some of my duties was to higher extra clerical staff to manage what I consider clerical tasks”~ participant one

Archival Data

2015 LCAP and budget ~ participant one
- Add instructional aides to support student learning

2014 LCAP and budget ~ participant one
- Mental health support was not provided as hoped
- Counselor was not added to the staff
- Computer technician hours increased

2015 LCAP and budget ~ participant two
- Higher a music teacher and PE teacher

2014 LCAP and budget ~ participant two
- Teachers hired with English Learner authorizations
- Bilingual Aide hired
- Special Education teacher hired to provide intervention services
- Intervention aide hired

(continued)
### Archival Data

**2015 LCAP and budget ~ participant three**

- All staff attending a technology conference
- High bilingual aide
- Maintain funding for a special education teacher
- Hire a PE teacher

**2014 LCAP and budget ~ participant three**

- Math intervention aide
- Intervention support aide

### Political Frame

Definition: Competing interests and agendas; focus on conflict/tension between different constituencies, groups, organizations; disputes over resource allocation; games of power and self interest.

### Interview Data

“Even have a small three member school board, I often find it difficult to fill open board seats” ~ participant three

“Lack of space has caused me to develop a priority placement list for new students which is frustrating as I would like to serve all students and have no limits on space” ~ participant three

“I recently had a school board member arrested for illegal activities that were drug related and I am struggling with how to handle that within my school board. It is common knowledge and this board member was a small business owner and respected member of the community” ~ participant one

“Providing needed services are a priority for the school board and the community. However, our funding doesn’t directly support all that we need. We have had to engage in many discussions to prioritize spending” ~ participant two

“The support of my county office has decreased in the last several years” ~ participant two

“Without the support of my county office, I could not do this job” ~ participant one

(continued)
Archival Data

2015 LCAP and budget ~ participant one
• Improve school facilities to improve services to students in a rural community. Additional spending in the following areas; counseling, transportation, behavior and intervention programs.

2015 LCAP, budget and board minutes ~ participant two
• The district LCAP was written to fund salaries for support services (SPED, ELD, RTI intervention services) for students. It was clear after reviewing the budget and board minutes that while these positions are clearly a priority for the district, the budget required that their salaries be paid from other budget categories to be continued. The stakeholders provided evidence in meetings of their commitment to these services for their students.

2015 LCAP ~ participant three
• It was noted that fewer, broader goals with more specific actions would better align with the reality of what needs to occur in the district

Summary

This chapter presented the data and findings from interviews of three superintendent/principals. Based on the analysis of the themes and patterns of the data, there appears to be some similar challenges that are experienced by all three of the participants. Table 11 provides a summary of the research questions, the findings, and the archival documents examined.

The challenge with the most significant responses was specifically related to the complexity of the job. This challenge, delineated into subsequent themes, is the challenge that was identified by all three participants as the most significant. Additional challenges were also recognized but the responses were not as significant.
Table 11

Summary of Research Questions and Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Finding (s)</th>
<th>Archival Documents Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: What are the key challenges of the superintendent/principal as perceived by superintendent/principals?</td>
<td>Finding 1: Job Complexity</td>
<td>• School Board agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• superintendent/principal duties</td>
<td>• District Budgets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• legal mandates</td>
<td>• School Site Council agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• redundancy of forms and required paperwork</td>
<td>• Meeting minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• district size</td>
<td>• Staff meeting agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding 2: Staffing</td>
<td>• ACSA website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding 3: Enrollment</td>
<td>• SSDA website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• CDE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• LEAP, LCAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Enrollment data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Election rosters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2: What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges?</td>
<td>Finding 1: Shared Leadership</td>
<td>• Staff meeting agendas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding 2: Shared Expertise</td>
<td>• Workshop flyers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• County Office of Education websites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Local Control Accountability Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Budgets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Demographic data of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3: Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal?</td>
<td>No differences were evidenced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional data was collected to provide insight on what strategies the participants use to mitigate these challenges. Again, the data presents some similar themes from the participants for mitigating the challenges.

Demographic data was collected on the participants, but the responses to the interview questions were not impacted by the gender, years of experience, or the
education level of the participants. Enrollment data was added to the demographic data as enrollment was identified as a challenge for one of the participants.

The data was then aligned to Bolman and Deal’s four frames to identify how the data provided by the superintendent/principals both in interviews and by the review of archival documents matched the criteria suggested by the Bolman and Deal framework.

Chapter V offers a summary of the major findings from the analysis in Chapter IV, conclusions, implications, unexpected findings, recommendations for further action, recommendations for further research, concluding remarks, and reflections from the researcher.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The history of schooling in the United States can be traced to the early 17th century. The one room schoolhouse evolved to the current bureaucratic structure in the 1940s (Cremin, 1961, 1970; Rousemanier, 2013). The traditional district structure has a superintendent as the district’s chief administrative officer, with layers of administration beneath the superintendent on the organizational chart. However, districts in rural communities have a different school structure; they have a superintendent/principal as the only administrator. In their 2008 study Canales et al. agreed that rural school leadership is complex. They further stated that leaders in rural schools wear many hats (Canales et al., 2008). Arnold and the Mid-Continent Research in Education and Learning (2004) argued that rural school districts face a different set of challenges than their urban and suburban counterparts.

Chapter I introduced the preliminary literature of this study. Chapter II contained a review of the literature that pertains specifically to the purpose of this study. Chapter III presented the methodology and the data collection procedures used to conduct the research in this study. Chapter IV presented the findings, delineated by themes, for each of the research questions. The findings were obtained using semi-structured interviews and a review of archival documents.

Chapter V analyzes and summarizes the findings related to the challenges and subsequent strategies used by superintendent/principals to mitigate these challenges. The purpose of this study, the research questions, the methodology, and the data collection methods are restated. Additionally, the population and sample are outlined, followed by the presentation of themes and data analysis. The major findings for each research
question are summarized, followed by conclusions, implications, unexpected findings, recommendations for further action, and recommendations for further research. Finally, the chapter concludes with remarks and reflections.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the corresponding strategies used to mitigate those challenges.

**Research Questions**

Three research questions guided this study. The first two were developed to identify the challenges and subsequent strategies of rural school superintendent/principals, and the final question identified if any differences existed based on the demographic characteristics of the study participants.

1. What are the key challenges of the superintendent/principal as perceived by superintendent/principals?
2. What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges?
3. Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal?

**Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

This study utilized a qualitative case study method of research. Yin believes this methodology allows the researcher to explore differences between cases and predict similar results across cases so comparisons can be drawn (Yin, 2003). This study was conducted to learn about the challenges and strategies used to mitigate those identified
challenges of rural school superintendent/principals, and to determine if these challenges differed by gender, experience, and level of education. Semi-structured interviews were selected for this study because they are well suited for case study research because of their flexibility to ask follow-up questions to probe more deeply into issues (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). The questions used to create the interview script (see Appendix B), which guided each semi-structured interview, were created based on the research presented in the study. Each interview was conducted so that any necessary follow-up questions could be asked if the researcher deemed them necessary.

The data collected was then coded and analyzed for themes and patterns. This process allowed the data to speak for itself without pre-determined codes. The data collected was subsequently aligned to the Bolman and Deal Four frames (2003) to categorize the challenges and subsequent strategies into a research-based model for analysis.

**Population**

A population is “a group of individuals or events from which a sample is drawn and to which results can be generalized” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 48). The population of this study was the superintendent/principals who serve as leaders in rural California schools.

The target population for the present study was the forty-six superintendent/principals in the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), Region 2. County Office of Education websites were examined by the researcher and contact information obtained. Those districts that no longer identified a role of superintendent/principal were removed from the list. The researcher also
contacted County Office of Education personnel to narrow the list to only those superintendent/principals that might be willing to participate in the study. An introductory email was sent which presented an overview of the study and an explanation of why the superintendent/principal had been selected to receive an invitation. Three attachments were included with the email: a) the full research study invitation (see Appendix C), b) an informed consent form (see Appendix D) and a copy of the interview protocol (see Appendix B).

Sample

A sample is “the group of subjects from whom data are collected; often representative of a specific population” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 490). For the purpose of this study a convenience sample was collected. A convenience sample is a non-probability technique of obtaining a sample because of the accessibility and proximity to the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The sample selected for this study was three volunteers from the forty-six superintendent/principals listed in the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA) Region 2. To further delineate the sample, each volunteer was asked to provide his/her years of experience. Qualitative research is designed to use smaller sample sizes to gain more detailed information about participants (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, multiple-case study design can be used to predict similar or contrasting results, based on literal or theoretical replication, respectively (Yin, 2003). Yin also states “the typical criteria regarding sample size is irrelevant in multiple-case design” (Yin, 2003, p 59). Instead Yin suggests that sample size should be a reflection of
the number of case replications, both literal and theoretical, and is a matter of
discretionary judgment and choice of the researcher.

The sample for this study was three superintendent/principals who provided their
informed consent and agreed to be interviewed. These three participants were selected to
illustrate the similarities and differences in identified challenges and perceived strategies
based on years of experience, gender, and level of education. Of the three, one was
female and two were male. The years of serving as a superintendent/principal were four
years to 13 years. Enrollment for the participants varied from 114 – 201 students. All
three participants were principal/superintendents of school districts in Northern
California CCSESA Region 2 in K-8 districts. Table 6 displays the participant
information for the three participants. Each participant was numbered in order by date
and time of their interviews. Because the study is anonymous, neither the name of the
participant nor the school district is identified

**Major Findings**

A summary of the key findings that emerged from the analysis in Chapter IV is
presented in the following sections. The findings are organized by research question and
are the result of information gathered during interviews and the subsequent review of
archival documents.

**Research Question 1**

The first research question asked “What are the key challenges of the
superintendent/principal as perceived by the superintendent/principals?” The
superintendent/principals identified three challenges as key:
1. *The overwhelming complexity of the job.* All three participants immediately identified that the job feels impossible. Specifically the participants felt that a) the balance between the role of superintendent and principal was difficult to delineate, b) the legal mandates were sometimes not possible to meet in the small school setting, c) there was a redundancy of paperwork required for a district and a school, and d) it was a challenge to be a small school with limited space and limited personnel.

2. *Staffing.* Each participant identified this as a challenge, but the challenge was very different for each participant. One identified the ability to retain staff because of distance and wages paid, the other the ability to find qualified applicants in subject areas, and the third about filling empty seats on the board of trustees.

3. *Enrollment.* One participant identified this as challenge due to lack of space. The school is only capable of serving 173 students and is currently at capacity. The participant found it a challenge to have to tell parents that the school was full and to be able to manage the subsequent disappointment and parent frustration.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question asked, “What strategies are identified by the superintendent/principals to mitigate their perceived challenges?” Three themes emerged regarding strategies that assisted the superintendent/principals to address their perceived challenges.
1. **Shared Leadership.** This theme captured the idea that the superintendent/principal shared the workload with other staff members. Two of the three participants identified this as a strategy. However, one of the participants stated that she uses it cautiously with teachers, as she is concerned that she might overwhelm her teaching staff, and she wants their priority to be the classroom and student learning.

2. **Shared Expertise.** This strategy refers to the superintendent/principals using peers to help mitigate the challenge of having to be an expert in so many areas, and the feeling of loneliness as the only campus administrator. Each participant cited a different strategy under this theme. One reported regular meetings between the superintendent/principals in his county to support each other. Besides the informal meetings these superintendent/principals also relied on each other’s expertise to help balance the load, to the point of supporting each other’s staff in the area of need. It should be noted that data associated with this challenge led to an unexpected finding about the level of support each participant felt they received from their county office of education. Details of this unexpected finding will be discussed in that section.

2. **Job Definition.** This theme addressed the mental processes that two of the superintendent/principals reported that helped them delineate their work. Each participant identified a unique but effective strategy. One reported that he defined his role based on who is on the campus – students and staff vs. an empty campus. The other reported a process of putting on a figurative hat
depending on the job she is doing, and knowing that while the hats are
different, they are both equally needed and can both be equally as effective.

**Research Question 3**

The third research question asked, “Are there differences in the perceived challenges based on gender, years of experience, and level of education of the superintendent/principal?” The data collected showed no connection or difference between challenges and strategies based on these distinct demographics. The difference in responses based on district size, not part of the original demographic data collection, was noted and delineated in response to research question 1.

**Connecting the Findings to Bolman and Deal’s Four Frames**

Bolman and Deal (2002) suggest “educational leaders are most effective when they employ practical ways of thinking in schools and classrooms” (p. 2). The interview data and archival evidence in this case study related to Bolman and Deal’s four frames: structural, symbolic, human resource, and political.

**The Symbolic Frame.** This frame focuses on meaning, belief, and how to make sense of chaos and ambiguity (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal suggest that a leader is effective in the symbolic frame when they utilize a process of inspiration and meaning making. They further suggest that leaders lead through both actions and words, while bringing passion and purpose (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The strategy of job definition aligns with Bolman and Deal’s (2013) recommendation that symbolic leaders frame experience and communicate vision (p. 367).

**The Structural Frame.** Bolman and Deal (2013) consider this frame the oldest way to think about organizations, i.e., the structure or organizational chart. Job
complexity is considered a structural component, specifically the complexity of having to fill two distinct roles, that of a superintendent and that of a principal. Bolman and Deal suggest that effective leaders serve as analysts and architects. The use of the strategy of shared expertise aligns with one of Bolman and Deal’s keystones of this frame – division of tasks. Bolman and Deal also believe effective structural leaders rethink the relationship between structure, strategy, and environment, and focus on implementation (2013, p. 359).

The Human Resource Frame. The center of this frame is about what organizations and people do to each other and for each other (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The challenges that aligned to this frame revolved around hiring and keeping staff. Effective leaders utilized empowerment and support in this frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Leaders in this frame are visible and accessible, and communicate a strong belief in people (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 361). According to Bolman and Deal gifted human resource leaders utilize people-friendly leadership principles, and make it clear that employees have a stake in the organization’s success. The strategies of shared leadership and shared expertise are what Bolman and Deal consider “high involvement strategies.”

The Political Frame. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that the political frame be viewed as the heart of decision-making, and it is the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources. Political leaders are effective when they use processes such as advocacy and coalition building (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 355). Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest that political leaders assess the distribution of power and utilize clarity. Bolman and Deal suggest strategies such as making a persuasive case, being a realist, and building linkages to key stakeholders can overcome challenges in the political frame.
Additionally, Bolman and Deal advocate that political leaders persuade first, negotiate second, and coerce only if necessary (p. 364).

**Summary of connections of findings to Bolman and Deal’s four frames.**

When reviewing the interview findings along with the archival documents it was determined that the challenge of job complexity aligned with both the symbolic and structural frames. The challenge of staffing was related to the human resources frame, and the challenge of enrollment was related to the political frame. The strategies suggested by superintendent/principals identified correlated with Bolman and Deal’s suggested frame-related actions such as developing vision, implementing policy, and adding new processes or structures.

Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest leaders reframe situations, or change lens, when things don’t make sense or are not working. Bolman and Deal further suggest that leaders can use frames to generate alternative approaches to challenging circumstances. The findings revealed that superintendent/principals are utilizing practical strategies to mitigate their challenges. However, these strategies are not tied to any measure of effectiveness.

**Unexpected Findings**

One finding surfaced as unexpected during the semi-structured interview process. This finding was the difference in the support each participant perceived they received from their corresponding County Office of Education. While not directly seeking insight on the level of involvement and support of the County Office of Education or the County Superintendent of Schools, each participant referenced the relationship during the interview process. Specifically, participant two reported that he believes the support
from his county office has decreased in the last several years. The researcher then probed for additional detail. This unexpected finding added to the research and is addressed in both the conclusions and the recommendations for further action.

**Conclusions**

The focus of this study was the challenges and subsequent strategies to mitigate those challenges of rural school superintendent/principals. The challenges were then analyzed and aligned to Bolman and Deal’s four frames to determine if the challenges and subsequent strategies identified by the participants aligned with the recommendations from Bolman and Deal. The following conclusions can be made regarding the findings of this study:

1. Based on the findings in this study and the literature, superintendent/principals feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the job, and struggle with being able to complete the tasks of both a district leader and a school site leader. According to Canales et al. (2008) and Willis and Harmon (1992), rural school leaders are required to wear many hats. Additionally, leaders of small rural schools are facing many challenges in the age of accountability, implementation of new standards, and the transparency of education (Bambrik-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Fullan, 2014). The ongoing demands of the current leadership structure of the superintendent/principal are not an indicator of effective school leadership (Arnold & Mid-Continent, 2000; Barley & Beesley, 2007; Budge, 2006; Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Center, 2009; Chalker, 1999; Forner et al., 2012; Geivett, 2010; Jacobson, 1986; Johnson, et al., 2014; Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009; Schuman, 2010;
Stephens et al., 1988). It is concluded that superintendent/principals need additional training, support, and strategies to manage the multiple responsibilities that are intrinsic to their role.

2. As noted in the findings and supported by the literature, superintendent/principals feel isolated and unrepresented as a specific job category but professional organizations. This feeling of isolation and underrepresentation results in superintendent/principals utilizing the job as a stepping-stone to the next administrative position (Canales, et al 2008). Isolation leads to high turnover rates in the role of superintendent/principal and very few serving in the role for greater than a few years. High turnover rates exist for a variety of reasons, such as isolation, budgets, salary, and community challenges, and the high turnover impacts the school community and leads to a lack of continuity in school planning and the ability to lead effectively (Arnold et al., 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Maynard, 2005; Fusarelli & Militello, 2012, Lock et al., 2012; Miller and Mid-Continent, 2004; Schuman, 2010). It is concluded that professional organizations need to recognize that the role of superintendent/principal is not equal to that of a superintendent of a district and provided not only support but also recognition for the unique work that superintendent/principals perform.

3. Based on the findings and supported by the literature, there is a lack of consistency of support from administrative associations and County Offices of Education for the specific needs of the role of superintendent/principal. Those in the role are placed with superintendents, sometimes delimited by the school
size, but not delineated by the specific job title and specific needs of a superintendent/principal when there are clear differences that the job itself is different. In his 2010 study, Morton Geivett concluded that “the superintendent/principal must possess a huge skill set, and the range of knowledge and expertise required to accurately and effectively accomplish the work of this dual role assignment places an exceptional burden and stress on the individual to meet the constant unpredictable demands” (p. 188).

The role of rural superintendent/principal is full of multiple responsibilities with limited opportunities to engage in professional development (Cortez-Jimenez, 2012). Therefore, it is concluded that currently superintendent/principals need additional support in areas such as; budget, federal mandates, technology, curriculum, special education and English Language Learners, to name a few, from their County Offices of Education and from professional organizations.

4. Based on the findings and supported by literature, the legal mandates and state and federal requirements that are completed by all districts are more burdensome to districts with only a superintendent/principal as the administrator. The need to complete both school level and district level reporting, along with understanding and implementing legal mandates that are sometimes unrealistic for the size of the school, directly impact the superintendent/principal’s ability to serve their school community. Canales et al. (2008, 2010) and Geivett (2010) noted that the multiple roles and
responsibilities of the dual position of superintendent/principal may impede the leader’s ability to lead effectively. It is concluded that state and federal regulations need to be simplified for schools that are also the district, and that support is needed to assist superintendent/principals in navigating legal mandates.

5. Based on the findings of this study and the literature, the concept of shared leadership and shared expertise is a strategy utilized by superintendent/principals to balance the overwhelming responsibilities of their role. It was concluded that strategies such as shared leadership to create a cadre of support is not being used to its fullest potential or consistently. Printy and Marks (2006) suggest that principals alone cannot provide the leadership needed to systematically improve the quality of instruction or the level of student achievement, and that the best results occur when principals are strong leaders who facilitate leadership by teachers. Lambert suggests in her 2002 Framework for Shared Leadership that a growing number of schools are using the building of leadership capacity as a way to bring about sustainable school improvement. Lambert proposes that we can no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader without the participation of other educators.

**Implications for Action**

In reviewing the data collected from the interviews and the associated archival items, several implications for further action were identified. Superintendent/principals find themselves in a role that is overwhelming and often unmanageable. They believe
they are not recognized by professional organizations or supported by their County Office of Education for the unique work they do. Furthermore, the legal mandates and state and federal reporting requirements are unrealistic for their small districts/schools, and the strategy of shared leadership and shared expertise is being explored but not necessarily utilized effectively. The superintendent/principals that participated in this study shared strategies that assisted them in managing the challenges that they identified. All three participants shared that they would appreciate any support to help them excel in their role. The researcher agrees that this support is needed for superintendent/principals – new and experienced, male and female, regardless of school demographics and enrollment.

The following are recommendations for further action:

1. *Create a small district support center:* Currently, County Offices of Education and County Superintendents of Schools provide different support for districts in their county depending on the county vision, perception, and desire of the County Superintendent of Schools. A small district support center should be created and housed by a County Office of Education to serve all the small districts in California. Services would be purchased at a reduced rate on a contract basis, and provide support face-to-face, via video conferencing or personal visit, electronic communication, workshops, and print materials. Funds to purchase these services should be made available to districts via the Local Control Funding Formula by creating a funding allotment specific to small rural districts. Some areas of expertise that should be supported in this small district center are:
a. Budgeting and fiscal planning  
b. Contract bids and modernization  
c. Professional development  
d. Data and assessment analysis and reporting  
e. State, Federal and local reporting (LCAP, LEAP, SPSA, SARC, etc)  
f. Technology infrastructure and support  
g. Professional development for teachers and administrators  
h. Coaching and mentorship  
i. Board policy development and school board training  
j. Special Education (due process, IEP development, behavior interventions, School Based Mental Health Services)  
k. English Learners  
l. Volume discount for supplies and software purchases  
m. One-stop center to assist with questions and to provide referral to appropriate agencies for resources.

2. Create an academy focused on the needs of rural school administrators.

Professional organizations such as the Association for California School Administrators (ACSA) or the Small School Districts Association (SSDA) should develop professional learning directly correlated with the work of the superintendent/principal. Shared expertise would be utilized by those experienced in the role to support both new and experienced superintendent/principals. Topics to be included: legal issues of rural schools, budgeting for rural schools, accountability and assessment, hiring and
retaining staff, credentialing, working with school boards in small communities, best practices for English Learners and Special Education with small populations, as well as curriculum development and instruction in multi-grade classrooms.

3. **Develop a network of support specific to superintendent/principals.** In the process of developing a sample of participants for this study the researcher contacted SSDA for a list of superintendent/principals. SSDA reported that they don’t delineate the job by that role but rather lump all of their district leaders together as superintendents. Since the role of superintendent/principal is unique it should be delineated by professional organizations, as well as the California Department of Education, as a distinct job category. This will allow support networks to be developed by professional organizations and ensure the unique role is identified as such. The 2007 Ed-Source report indicates that it is difficult to obtain data on the role of superintendent/principal due to lack of identification as a specific job title. SSDA is the perfect organization to take the lead and should immediately begin to delineate this specific role.

4. **Provide specific advocacy and briefings on legal issues.** Professional organizations currently provide summaries of legal issues that impact education, as well as advocate for schools and districts in the legislative bodies. This work should be enhanced by providing support specifically focused on the needs of the superintendent/principal. For example: ACSA supports a Legislative Action Day where ACSA members can speak directly
to their congressional and assembly representatives. This would allow members to speak specifically about the needs of the superintendent/principal, and awareness of this unique role could be improved. ACSA should make it a priority to include the voice of their members who serve small districts.

5. *Develop focused workshops/conferences.* Professional organizations that provide conferences and workshops for educational agencies should offer specific workshops and conferences for the small rural school that has a superintendent/principal as a leader. These organizations that should create and offer this learning include ACSA, SSDA, California Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), ASCD and others.

6. *Develop a mentor program for superintendent/principals:* Mentor programs currently exist in professional organizations such as ACSA. However these programs are not specifically designed for superintendent/principals, although appropriate matches are made if possible. ACSA should focus on finding mentors that can provide expertise on this unique role should be a priority, in order to mentor new administrators.

7. *Provide simplification of state and federal reporting requirements.* The California Department of Education (CDE) should prioritize the simplification of current district and school reporting to be more accommodating for single school districts. The development of one report that provides the data needed would lesson redundancy and ensure compliance. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction in California must lead the charge with the California State School Board to ensure this simplification is a priority.
8. *Develop job specific legislative briefs.* Legislative briefings are sent by professional organizations on a regular basis. By delineating these briefs specific to rural schools, professional organizations can assist superintendent/principals. Specifically, these briefs should provide insight on how they can meet mandates and requirements that are not always realistic in small school settings.

9. *Create a support network.* ACSA currently supports, in their strategic plan, several sub groups of administrators to provide equity and access (i.e., Women’s Leadership Network, California Association of Latino Superintendents, California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators). Superintendent/principals should be added to this focus by requiring ACSA charters to develop job-alike workshops and activities to support the needs of this specific job title.

10. *Provide ongoing professional development to support a structure of shared leadership.* As supported in the research of Lamkin (2002) and Printy & Mark (2006) a single leader cannot shoulder the responsibility of instructional leadership. Specific professional development must be provided to support the superintendent/principal to develop teacher leaders, with the intent of lightening the burden of the single school leader, and developing effective educational systems for students. Attention must be focused on how to utilize shared leadership practices without overburdening the staff of small schools.

11. *Provide training on using Bolman and Deal’s four frames to integrate the frames into regular practice and support effective leadership practices.*
Bolman & Deal (2013) report that the ability to use multiple frames was a consistent correlate of effectiveness. Managers were associated with effectiveness by using the structural frame, and leaders were effective using the symbolic and political frame. Bolman & Deal further report that harmonizing the frames by creating inventive responses to new circumstances is essential in both management and leadership (2013). By gaining better understanding of Bolman & Deal’s research, leaders can begin to match a frame to situations and develop a course of action (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Assisting superintendent/principals in utilizing the four frames to reframe situations will provide the opportunity for improved leadership effectiveness.

12. Change the state funding model to support bulk purchases for small districts.

In the area of increased accountability all districts need to find tools to assist in managing and evaluating student assessment data, tracking student records, creating Individual Education Plans and other reporting needs of districts.

The California Local Control Funding Formula provides funding specific to identified sub groups such as foster youth and English Language Learners. However, this funding model does not recognize the unique needs of rural districts that have to provide the same level of service as a large district even if they only have one student in a sub category. The funding formula in California must be reconfigured to recognize the specific needs of small rural schools and provide adequate funding to support their needs and place rural districts on the small playing field as larger districts.
Recommendations for Further Research

Many avenues for further research exist. This study only examined the challenges and subsequent strategies of superintendent/principals in California. Findings from this study suggest the following recommendations to further the research:

1. Expand the study to further define the identified strategies for effectiveness to mitigate challenges.
2. Replicate the study to identify the same challenges and subsequent strategies for the job role of Charter School Director.
3. Study the leadership styles of administrators who choose the role of superintendent/principal.
4. Expand the study to include superintendents who have multiple schools and site principals in rural school districts.
5. Conduct a quantitative study of the correlation between perceived challenges of superintendent/principals who have served one year vs. those who have served four years or more.
6. Conduct a study on the role of County Offices of Education to support rural schools.
7. Conduct a study on the role of County Offices of Education to support different job roles. i.e., superintendent, superintendent/principal, chief business officers, and leaders of charter schools.
8. Replicate the study for other states with rural schools.
9. Conduct a qualitative study to examine the culture and community components of the superintendent/principal role.
10. Conduct a study that examines the values, level of job satisfaction and reason for leaving of superintendent/principals who served less than three years in the role.

11. Conduct a study to analyze how superintendent/principals cope with the stressors of their role and maintain balance in their life.

12. Conduct a study to examine the effect of the isolation that occurs in the role of superintendent/principal.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As an elementary school student I attended a small school in a rural community. In fact, my kindergarten experience was in a little red one-room schoolhouse. As a member of a rural community it became evident to me at that young age how the school was incorporated into the community. I remember seeing the superintendent, principal and teachers as community members as much as teachers and school leaders. Their visibility was evident. I went on to attend a small high school (less than 300 students) and again, the high school was where the community gathered. High school football is a community event and attendance is a community expectation in rural areas.

As a new teacher, I taught at the small high school I attended, and experienced the enrollment grow from 300 to 700 during my eleven-year tenure as a teacher. As a teacher, I watched the work of my superintendent/principal but didn’t really understand the overwhelming responsibilities of the job until I took my first administrative position. As a new administrator in a district that was much larger than my teaching assignment I began to notice the differences between the job duties of a superintendent and those of a superintendent/principal. As my career continued and I held other district administrative
roles I began to see how duties were shared between site principals, district staff, and a superintendent.

My next administrative role placed me as a coordinator in a County Office of Education in a diverse, rural, and geographically spread out county. During my tenure in this role I began to work closely with superintendent/principals. On a regular basis I found myself supporting superintendents/principals in a variety of ways and they began to share their frustration and the concerns that were associated with that particular role. It is from those conversations that the idea for this study was born. As I began the research for chapter 2 of this study it became evident that little or no research existed about this specific administrative position.

From the first interview to the last, I heard loud and clear the passion of those serving in this role. The interviewees also shared their feelings of fighting a battle to do an impossible job. During the interview one of my participants responded “This is an impossible job. When I started I was extremely confident that it was not that hard. Now that I have lived, breathed, and survived this job for four years I have realized that it is very hard but also very rewarding.” I appreciated every one of the participant’s dedication to the students in rural schools. One of them identified that she wanted to be a superintendent/principal in a rural school because it was just that, rural, and she appreciates the sense of community. She identifies with her students, as she too was a student in a rural school. She shared that she just feels at home, and believes the job is the perfect way to still be with students (her principal hat) while being part of something larger (her superintendent hat).
This study provided findings and recommendations on the challenges and strategies of rural school superintendent/principals. My hope is that this study adds to the limited research on the needs of those serving in this role. We are serving thousands of students nationwide in rural communities. Regardless of the title of the leader of those small districts the needs of those students should not be dismissed. Those students deserve our finest effort to provide them the best education possible. It is our moral responsibility to do so. This study was essential to bring forward the needs of a group of administrators who feel they are the “lone rangers” of these school communities, a group who feel they are not recognized as a separate job category, and who are often subject to professional development that is not applicable to their unique job role. I was extremely impressed by the dedication of those I interviewed, and just as equally impressed by their ability to find the strategies to make them successful. I look forward to sharing the strategies that the participants identified, and look forward to providing what I have learned to professional organizations such as ACSA and SDSA and the County Offices of Education in order to develop workshops, study sessions, and support to assist those serving in the superintendent/principal role.
REFERENCES


Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The*


Miller, K., & Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, (2004). Creating conditions for leadership effectiveness: The district's role. McREL Policy Brief. *Mid-Continent Research For Education And Learning (Mcrel).*


## Appendix A

### Synthesis Matrix

**Rural School Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Source</th>
<th>Community Expectations</th>
<th>Turnover</th>
<th>Isolation/Poverty</th>
<th>Budgets</th>
<th>Day-to-Day Operations</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arnold (2010)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnold et al (2005)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambrick –Santoyo and Pieser (2012)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barley and Beesley (2007)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Fernigno and Maynard (2005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dufour and Fullan (2013)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dufour and Marzano (2009)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fullan (2010)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fullan (2014)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ ✓ ✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection to Bolman and Deal Four frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forner (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fusarelli and Militello (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leithwood and Seashore (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock et al (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller and Midcontinent (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schuman (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr and White (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southworth (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William and Nierengaten (2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Leadership Challenges – Superintendents

#### Connections to Bolman and Deals

Four frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budgets</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Board</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional leadership</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Author/Source

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Source</th>
<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Budgets</th>
<th>School Board</th>
<th>Instructional leadership</th>
<th>Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ed-Source (2007)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forner (2010)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fullan (2002)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hargrave and Fullan (2004)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heis (1999)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leithwood (1995)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyack and Hansot (1982)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Leadership Challenges – Principals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connections to Bolman and Deals</th>
<th>Four frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Source</th>
<th>Instructional leadership</th>
<th>Day-to-Day operations</th>
<th>Adequate Job Training</th>
<th>Community Relations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combs, Edmonson and Jackson (2009)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farkas, Johnson and Duffett (2003)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forner, Bierlein-Palmer and Reeves (2012)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fullan (2014)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lock et al (2012)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preston (2013)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rousmaniere (2013)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections to Bolman and Deals Four frames</td>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Structural</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author/Source</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canales et al (2008)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canales et al (2010)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cortez and Jimenez (2012)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geivette (2010)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamkin (2006)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masumoto, Brown and Welty (2009)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renihan and Noonan (2012)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starr and White (2008)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobin (2006)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Interview Script

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to be part of my study. I hope to gain an understanding of the challenges you experience as a superintendent/principal in a rural school. There may be follow-up questions asked of the participants of this study for clarity.

Interview Script

Interviewer: Christine McCormick

Interview time planned: Approximately 1 hour

Interview location: Venue of choice

Recording: Digital Voice

Written: Observational notes

Opening comments:

Based on the email you received you understand that this is a study to explore the challenges faced by rural school superintendent/principals and the strategies used to mitigate those challenges. The interview questions will be focused on identifying challenges and the subsequent strategies to mitigate those challenges. Thank you for your willingness to participate. Information from this one-on-one interview will be included in my doctoral dissertation. For your privacy, your identity will not be revealed and will remain confidential. You signed a consent form to participate in this study, and you may elect to withdraw that consent at any time. If at any time you don’t understand a question or find that you need additional information for clarity, please don't hesitate to ask. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?
Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you been a school administrator?
2. How many years have you been in your current position?
3. What led you to the role of superintendent/principal?
4. Why did you choose to work in a rural/small community?
5. What is your level of education?
6. Regarding challenges in your role as a superintendent/principal in a rural school –
   Tell me about some of the most significant challenges that you experienced?
   
   Prompt: financial, community relations, politics/board relations, accountability, personnel, state and federal mandates

   Potential follow-up questions:
   
   • Tell me why you feel the challenge was significant
   • What do you believe makes some challenges more significant than others?
   • Do you feel that the challenges you have experienced are related to the combined role of superintendent/principal?

7. Of the challenges we have discussed, what strategies/tools have you utilized to minimize those challenges?

   Prompt: community relationships, open door policy, board member relationships and stability, work with teachers union, development of teacher leaders

8. Are there challenges that you have experienced that you believe are attributed to being located in a rural area?

   Prompt: poverty, parent education level, parent and community expectations
9. Do you believe that are strategies/tools that have you utilized to minimize the challenges associated with a rural location?

Closing:

Thank you again for volunteering to participate in this study. Are there any additional comments or thoughts that you would like to add?
Appendix C

Letter of Introduction – sent via email

November 1, 2015

Dear Superintendent/Principal,

Hello, my name is Christine McCormick. I am a doctoral student with Brandman University, working in the field of organizational leadership. For my dissertation I am researching the challenges and the strategies to mitigate these challenges as seen by rural school superintendent/principals in California. You have been identified to participate in my study as an interview participant. Participation is completely voluntary and would require you to provide informed consent at the time of the interview.

I know your time is precious. Through my research I have learned much about the nature of your work and the demands for your time. I realize that participating may not be at the top of your list of “things to do,” however I would like you to consider participating in this study. Your responses (confidential in nature), along with others from the sample population, will provide the school learning community with important information regarding your dual responsibility job role.

I appreciate your time, energy, and attention to this correspondence. If you are willing to participate in the study, please respond to this email at your earliest convenience. Should you have any questions or wish to discuss the study and its purpose further, please feel free to contact me via email or by telephone.

Thank you for your time and the work you do everyday to support children and their learning.

With appreciation,

Christine McCormick
916-871-0302
cmccormic@mail.brandman.edu
Appendix D

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: Challenges and strategies of rural school superintendent/principals in California.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Christine McCormick

THE PURPOSE OF STUDY:
The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to identify the challenges and the strategies to meet these challenges of superintendent/principals, and to determine if these challenges differ based on gender, time on the job, and level of education.

This study will fill the gap in research because it will identify the key challenges and strategies of the dual responsibilities of the superintendent/principal position. New and current superintendent/principals can utilize the research to inform their own leadership and development. Additionally, the results of this study can be used as training resources and potential workshop topics by professional organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) and the Small School District’s Association (SSDA). The research will also inform coaches who support superintendent/principals, as well as those who are seeking positions as a superintendent/principal.

By participating in this study I agree to participate in an interview. This interview will last approximately one hour and will be conducted in person, by phone, or electronically. The interview will take place January – March 2016.
I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.

b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding challenges and strategies of superintendent/principals. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Christine McCormick. She can be reached by email at cmccormi@mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 916-871-0302.

d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the interview at any time.

e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive
Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

___________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

___________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Christine McCormick at cmccormi@mail.brandman.edu.