The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

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The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

A Dissertation by

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Irvine, California.
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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I dedicate this dissertation to my son, my mom, and my dad. Words cannot express my gratitude, so I choose to write little. You have allowed me to make yet another dream a reality, and I am who I am because of who you are. Thank you.
ABSTRACT

The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

by Jacqueline Kearns

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between grit and successful California superintendents. Grit is a topic in infancy, only being first introduced in 2007. While there has been much research on the superintendency, there has yet to be any research exploring grit and the superintendency. The population of this study consisted of California superintendents who met the following criteria: 1. California public school district superintendent, 2. located in California, 3. Have more than three consecutive years in their current position, 4. Superintendents must meet at least two of the following criteria: a) have membership in professional organizations, b) have presented on leadership at local or state conference c) have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership. Subordinates must have been currently working for the superintendent and had worked for him or her for at least two years. In this mixed methods study, data was first collected electronically from superintendents using the Grit-S Survey. Subordinates of the superintendents who completed the Grit-S Survey were then asked to complete the same electronic survey, changing pronouns from “I” to “he/she” and using it to rate their superintendents’ level of grit. Interview questions further explored grit and how it contributes to the success of superintendents. Results of the study found that superintendents are very gritty and score high on each of the 8 attributes that measure grit. It was also found that subordinates rate their superintendents as gritty and rate them high on each of the 8 attributes that measure grit. The third finding showed that there was not a significant difference on how
superintendents self-reported their level of grit and how subordinates perceived their superintendents’ level of grit. The last finding revealed the personal and leadership attributes that contribute to a superintendents’ grittiness were purposeful perseverance, others focused, having a goal or vision to work toward, life experiences in formative years, being competitive and having high expectations, a willingness to work hard, having an outlet outside of work to maintain balance, having a supportive network of colleagues, and acknowledging and celebrating small wins.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Superintendents are faced with many challenges and are required to have a wide range of skills and abilities to effectively lead their schools (Cheung, 2013). Some of the major challenges superintendents face are budgets and funding (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; DeNisco, 2013a; Feuerstein, 2013; Kowalski, 2013; Tripses, Watkins, & Hunt, 2013), collaboration among all stakeholders (Bennett, McKee, & Martin, 2014; Copeland, 2013; Demski, 2013; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014; Tripses et al., 2013), accountability (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Beard, 2013; DeNisco, 2013a; Feuerstein, 2013; Tripses et al., 2013), community relations (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Bennett et al., 2014; Copeland, 2013; Feuerstein, 2013; Kowalski, 2013; Tripses et al., 2013), and human resource management (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Copeland, 2013; Kowalski, 2013; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) developed eight standards for the position of superintendent that include leadership and district culture, policy and governance, communication and community relations, organizational management, curriculum planning and development, instructional management, human resource management, and values and ethics of leadership. These standards translate into four major roles superintendents must assume on a daily basis and include the superintendent as chief executive officer (CEO), superintendent as politician, superintendent as instructional leader, and superintendent as community leader and liaison. As CEO the superintendent must manage the district’s budget and finances and human resources and oversee the attainment of the district’s vision and goals. As politician the superintendent must carefully interact with the board and community while carrying out policy and governance. As instructional leader the superintendent oversees
curriculum planning and development, instructional management, assessment, and accountability. As the community leader and liaison the superintendent is responsible for communicating with all stakeholders and maintaining positive community relations (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Tripses et al., 2013).

In the midst of the storm of leadership challenges the superintendent plays a key role in the success or failure of the schools they oversee (Stitt, 2010). In the United States, only 70% of high school seniors are graduating high school, which is considerably low when compared to Japan that has a 93% graduation rate and Denmark that has a 96% graduation rate (T. Wagner, 2010). It is vital that superintendents employ personnel who share their vision and will work to ensure all students are able to graduate (Asrani, 2010).

Glass and Franceschini, (2007) reported alarming numbers for the turnover of superintendents. They found that on average superintendents are only with their district for 5 1/2 years and that almost half (42%) of all superintendents stay with their district for 3 years or less, while the national turnover is about 17% a year. It is essential for the stability of education to identify character traits that will contribute to increased longevity of superintendents. Cheung (2013) commented on the need for superintendents to be strong leaders:

Education continues to shift due to internal and external factors, calling for reexamination of current practices in school districts. The demands of the position call for superintendents to continue to employ effective strategies and to master a multitude of skills to lead the school district. (pp. 84-85)

In this day in age where there are so many different and distinct areas competing for a superintendent’s attention, one who is able to stay committed to the vision over a
long period of time is more likely to be successful in his or her position. To do so requires grit. Grit was defined by Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly (2007) as “perseverance and passion of long-term goal despite setbacks and plateaus” (p. 1087). The character trait grit has been shown to contribute to successful leadership and is defined as the ability to achieve goals despite setbacks and plateaus (p. 1087). Grit is a relatively recent area of study with the concept first being introduced in 2007 by Duckworth et al. (2007) and has proven to be a key factor in educational leadership (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Grit is considered a character trait that is the result of prolonged and sustained talent and effort (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and as a result, grittier people tend to be more successful (Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, & Ericsson, 2011; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Hogan, 2013; Maddi, Matthews, Kelly, Villarreal, & White, 2012; Von Culin, Tsukayama, & Duckworth, 2014). Grit is an attribute that can be used as a predictor of success, and research is finding that people who demonstrate the character trait of grit are those who put in numerous hours of study and practice over long periods of time (Duckworth et al., 2007; Gladwell, 2008; Hogan 2013).

While recognizing one’s own leadership strengths is important (Rotter, 2004; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999), it has also been noted that how subordinates view their leaders and their leadership style is also essential for the optimum performance of an organization (Jose, 2013). It is not enough for leaders to think of themselves as strong, but one could argue that it is even more important how subordinates view their supervisor’s leadership ability because of the effect leadership has on an organization.
Superintendents need to be able to realign people when setbacks and obstacles occur and keep them focused despite all of the conflict and distractions. Since most superintendents’ employment in that position does not extend beyond 3 years, this study examines the degree to which superintendents used grit-based strategies to respond quickly to conflict and distractions, particularly at the board, senior administration, and administrative levels, in order to respond to conflict, change, politics, and competing demands.

Background

Changes in Education

Education has been changing at a rapid pace (Emmerson, 2005; Kane, 2010; Spitulnik, 2001). In only 50 years, since 1965, there have been four major educational reform movements: the Elementary and Secondary Education ACT (ESEA), Improving America’s School Act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and now the multistate implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

In 1965, the ESEA changed education on a national level. Its goal was to make equitable and thereby improve education for low-performing students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). While it did improve education being offered to low-achieving students, a report titled A Nation at Risk brought education back into the spotlight and made claims that the quality of American education was decreasing (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Almost 30 years after the ESEA, in 1994, President Clinton signed into law the Improving America’s School Act. This act is recognized mostly for the Title 1 program that brings additional money to schools where the number of disadvantaged students is
disproportionately high. The act brought $11 billion to public education over a 5-year period (“Summary of the Improving America’s Schools Act,” 1994).

Not long after the Improving America’s School Act came the era of NCLB, which became law in 2001. This new legislation forced states to align their assessments to state standards, which would help to ensure that all students would perform well on preset achievement levels set at the state level (American Federation of Teachers, 2001). By 2002, all 50 states had adopted the NCLB policy and began testing students to measure progress made toward mastery of the state standards. Of the 50 states, 17 decided the assessments would be high stakes, meaning that if schools received low test scores they could be taken over by the state or closed (Meyer, Orlofsky, Skinner, & Spicer, 2002).

In 2009, only 8 years after the implementation of NCLB, a new accountability system was created called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS were created in part due to the fact that if a child in one state moved to another state, there would likely be gaps in knowledge due to the fact that under NCLB curriculum standards were created at the state level. This resulted in frustration with stakeholders (Newman & Roskos, 2013). Additionally, there was a growing desire to increase the rigor in the American educational system ensuring that students were prepared for college upon graduation and able to compete globally (Common Core State Standards Initiative [CCSSI], 2014a).

With such rapid change occurring in education (Kane, 2010) there is an evident need for strong leadership. It is important to be able to identify what contributes to successful and sustained leadership. This study aims to examine the role grit plays in successful educational leadership at the level of the superintendency.
History of the Role of Superintendent

The role of the superintendent can be traced back to the time of the Civil War and has been changing and evolving ever since. In 1965, education in America changed dramatically with the ESEA (Callahan, 1966), and there was a major overarching shift of the superintendent’s position. Prior to the ESEA, Callahan (1966) suggested that there were four major periods of the superintendency. The first began around the time of the Civil War and lasted up until about World War I. Only men held the position, and they were seen as scholarly leaders, overseeing the content that was being taught. The second phase only lasted for the decade of the 1920s, and the superintendent was viewed as a business manager. Due to the increase in business transactions with the United States, school boards were largely composed of businessmen within the community, so the superintendent needed be able to work seamlessly with them (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The third phase took place from 1930 to about 1954. The superintendent now became the educational leader who focused mostly on instruction while schools themselves became more democratic. This shift was influenced largely by the economic downfall resulting from the great Depression (Kowalski, 2006). The last phase of the superintendency prior to ESEA, spanning approximately 1955-1965, was where the superintendent maintained the role of instructional leadership but now took responsibility for economic issues of the district as well as being a political figure (Callahan, 1966). The transition of the superintendency over the past 150 years is broad and long reaching, influenced largely by the cultural shifts that were occurring and are covered in more extensive detail in Chapter II.
When the ESEA became law in 1965, the superintendent assumed new responsibilities (in addition to the ones previously mentioned) focusing largely on student academic accountability. As a result of the increased accountability, superintendents began facing, and now face today, measurements that hold their districts and oftentimes their positions as leaders to a new standard (Maxwell, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

**Issues Facing Superintendents**

Today superintendents are faced with many challenges and the continual need to balance the many different areas of education they oversee. These areas can be summarized in the AASA standards for the superintendency, focusing on eight major areas that include leadership and district culture, policy and governance, communication and community relations, organizational management, curriculum planning and development, instructional management, human resource management, and values and ethics of leadership (AASA, 2014). California has focused these standards into seven performance domains: relationship with the board, administration of the school district, community relationships, staff and personnel relationships, educational leadership, business and finance, and personal qualities (DiPaola, 2010). These standards and performance domains surface as challenges for the superintendent in the form of budgeting and finance, politics, community relations, collaboration, human resource management, instructional leadership, and personal ethics and values (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Tripses et al., 2013). Marzano and Waters (2009) included the following in what they believe are key roles of the superintendent: ensuring collaborative goal setting, establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction, creating school board
alignment with and support of district goals, monitoring achievement and instruction goals, and allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.

In recent years with budget reductions, school closures, union issues, violence, and increased demands from the community with diverse values and beliefs, there is a driving need for grit. Superintendents need to have passion and perseverance in order to stay the course and accomplish the goals they have established for their districts.

**Perseverance**

Prior to the introduction of the concept of grit, perseverance is the term that most closely matches the concept of grit. Pickett et al. (2000) described perseverance as directed effort over a sustained period of time. Martin (2011) described perseverance as “voluntary continuation of action or behavior that is goal directed and typically in the face of difficulty or obstacles” (p. 146) and drew on the research of Peterson and Seligman (2004) that suggested the terms perseverance and persistence can be used interchangeably and that at the time their research was published, there was not a single theoretical work that was dominant in the area of perseverance research. A 2005 study by Killpack found that perseverance is a variable that influences work motivation and that perseverance has a high correlation with goal setting.

**Resiliency**

Since grit is a relatively new area of research, it can often be confused with resiliency. While grit is the sustained effort of pursuing goals over a long period of time (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), resiliency is the ability to bounce back from difficult situations or the ability to deal with stressful or challenging situations.
Grit

Grit is defined as the relentless pursuit of long-term goals despite setbacks, plateaus, or boredom and the ability to achieve those goals. It is a relatively recent area of study with the concept first being introduced in 2007 by Duckworth et al. (2007). They concluded that grit is an attribute that can be used as a predictor of success just as emotional intelligence (EQ) is and as intelligence quotient (IQ) once was. Research is finding that people who demonstrate the character trait of grit are those who put in numerous hours of study and practice over long periods of time (Duckworth et al., 2007; Gladwell, 2008; Hogan, 2013).

The character trait grit has also been shown to contribute to successful leadership (Duckworth et al., 2007). Educational leadership is no exception (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Grit is considered a character trait that is the result of prolonged and sustained talent and effort (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) and as a result, grittier people tend to be more successful (Duckworth et al., 2011; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Hogan, 2013; Maddi et al., 2012; Von Culin et al., 2014).

Since the concept of grit was first introduced in 2007 (Duckworth et al., 2007), many studies have been conducted to further explore the different components of grit, some which include the retention of first-year military cadets (Maddi et al., 2012); middle school National Spelling Bee Contestants (Duckworth et al., 2011); successful women in Big Law (Hogan, 2013); engagement, meaning, and happiness (Von Culin et al., 2014); and success in education and the workplace (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). These studies
and many more point to grit as a key component of success, all noting that participants who had a higher level of grit were generally more likely to be successful at what they were aiming to accomplish.

**Statement of the Research Problem**

Leadership instability is a problem that many school districts are facing. Between 2006 and 2009, 215 school districts were randomly selected out of the approximately 1,000 districts in California, and it was found that 45% of all superintendents left their jobs; and from the largest districts surveyed, 71% of superintendents did not retain their position. The research suggests that superintendents have such short occupancy for the position due to the many pressures they face from board members, parents, and school personnel (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Another study conducted by Glass and Franceschini (2007) showed consistent results in that 42% of the superintendents surveyed remained with districts for less than three years. In addition to the pressures superintendents feel from the school board and community, they also face high demands of student achievement though high-stakes assessments, the new CCSS, integration of technology, unions, politics, school finance, and poverty.

Never has there been a time in public education where there have been so many changes in standards and assessments in such a short period of time. In a span of only a few years in California alone there has been and will be a shift to the CCSS, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), Next Generation Science Standards, changes in the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) and California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), a new assessment for English language learners, the introduction and rapid adoption of STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) and
Project/Problem Based Learning (PBL). This is the first time in American history where the majority of the states have adopted a common set of stands (CCSS) and common assessment system upon which all curriculum and summative state assessments will be based (CCSSI, 2014a; Wallender, 2014).

The ability for leaders to face many challenges and problems that arise yet still stay committed to the organization requires them to persevere. According to Peterson and Seligma (2004), perseverance can be defined as “voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement” (p. 229) and is a key component to the relatively new concept of grit: “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087).

Since grit was first introduced in 2007 (Duckworth et al., 2007), there have been many studies conducted that all point to grit as a key component to success (Ashton, 2008; Gladwell, 2008, Maddi et al., 2012). Further research confirms that grit is also a factor in success in education (Duckworth et al., 2011; Tough, 2013) and success with motivation and perseverance (Von Culin et al., 2014). However, there has yet to be any research that studies the level of grit in superintendents and what factors have contributed to their grittiness. With such rapid changes in education in addition to the many issues superintendents face, it is essential for districts to be led by men and women who have strong leadership skills and the ability to persevere in their leadership despite setbacks and obstacles that might come their way. This ability for superintendents to persevere and accomplish the goals set out before shows that they have grit.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify and describe the level of grit in California superintendents as indicated by the Duckworth Grit Scale. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine how subordinates view their superintendent’s level of grit. It was also the purpose of this study to determine if a significant difference exists between the ratings of superintendents and subordinates on the Duckworth Grit Scale. The final purpose of this study was to discover how superintendents describe the attributes that contribute to their grittiness.

Research Questions

1. What do California superintendents perceive as their level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

2. What do superintendents’ subordinates perceive as the superintendent’s level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

3. Is there a significant difference between self-reported and subordinate-reported perceived levels of grit?

4. What are the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents perceive that contribute to their level of grit?

Significance of the Problem

Superintendents in California are responsible for the education of over six million students in kindergarten through Grade 12 (California Department of Education [CDE], 2014). However, the average duration of a superintendent is only 5 1/2 years, while over 40% of superintendents are with their districts for 3 years or less, and the national annual turnover rate is near 17% (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Grissom & Anderson, 2012).
With the responsibility of overseeing the education of students also comes pressures and expectations from school boards, parents, and the community as well the responsibility of high-stakes assessments, accountability, the new CCSS, integration of technology, personnel, school leadership, unions, and politics. All of these factors combined can be overwhelming. It is important that superintendents not only have the skill set to get the job done but also the perseverance, or grit, to see the district vision accomplished.

Grit is a topic in infancy, only being first introduced in 2007 (Duckworth et al., 2007). While it is gaining in popularity, much of the focus on grit in regard to education is centered on students (Ginsburg, 2011; Hoerr, 2013; Ricci, 2013; Ripley, 2013; Tough, 2013) with very little on the prevalence of grit in successful leaders, specifically superintendents. This study will begin to fill in the gap so as to better understand how and if grit is a factor in successful superintendents.

Superintendents are responsible for the education of thousands of students; and with the many challenges that superintendents face, it is important to know more about what contributes to their long-term sustained success. This research will help to further understand how grit contributes to the success of superintendents.

Definitions

Grit. A character trait that demonstrates ones passion for and ability to accomplish long-term goals despite setbacks, plateaus in progress, obstacles, or boredom (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Leadership. “The power or ability to lead other people” (“Leadership,” n.d.).

Standards. Professional expectations for certificated employees in the public school setting in California.
**Subordinate.** An individual who works directly for the superintendent.

**Superintendent.** An individual who is the leader of a school district; can be compared to the CEO of an organization.

**Delimitations**

This mixed methods study is limited to superintendents in the state of California who are currently working in a public, kindergarten through 12th-grade school district. This study is also limited to superintendents who have been employed more than three consecutive years in their current position and must also meet two of the three following criteria: (a) have membership in professional organizations, or (b) have presented on leadership at local or state conference, or (c) have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership.

Subordinates in this study are limited to those working closely with the superintendent for at least two years in their current position. Effort was made to have the subordinate group comprised mostly of assistant superintendents and deputy superintendents, as they are the ones working closest to the superintendent.

**Organization of the Study**

The remainder of the study is comprised of four additional chapters. Chapter II gives an extensive review of the literature and research that has been conducted around grit and the superintendency. Chapter III covers the methodological approach that was used to collect and analyze the data required to complete this study. Chapter IV is a presentation of the data collected as well as research findings and in-depth descriptions of the results of this study. Chapter V concludes this research study with an in-depth
analysis of the data including significant findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature within this chapter reviews the history of education since 1965 as well as the history of the superintendency. The chapter then focuses on the major issues facing superintendents today as they pertain to their leadership role and the supervisor-subordinate relationship. This chapter also explores the research that has been conducted on personality traits and leadership traits and styles as well as perseverance, resiliency, and grit.

Changes in Education since 1965

Within the past five decades, 1965-2015, education in the United States has been changing at a rapid pace and, according to Wallender (2014), “has not experienced a shortage of initiatives focused on improving schooling” (p. 8). From the federal level all the way down to the local level, transformational changes have been made, directly affecting how schools are educating students. To assist in organizing change, federal and state governments began funding reform initiatives to gather new ideas (Canfield, 2013; Fullan, 2007). As a result of the changes that have been made at both the federal and state levels, the educational environments themselves have been steadily changing, increasing the demand on student performance, which results in the need for more effective educational practices (Roach, Smith, & Boutin, 2011).

In 1965, a legislative effort to radically change public education was made through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This act was designed to improve and make equitable the education of low-achieving students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The ESEA was passed under the presidency of Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ). LBJ was once a schoolteacher himself, and he knew the struggles
minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students faced. It was his hope that by investing $1 billion (in the first year alone) in low-income schools and putting in place accountability measures, students who traditionally underperformed in school, due in part to inequalities in the educational system, would have access to a better education. In addition to the personal experience LBJ had as a teacher in a segregated school, this act also came on the heels of the civil rights movement with desegregation in the media and a focus to make sure all students had equal access to a quality education (Bishop & Jackson, 2015). This was the first time in U.S. history where the government made such a large-scale intervention in education. While many schools across the country were happy to receive the extra funding, not many were receptive to federal oversight (Klein, 2015). By the end of the decade, a new U.S. cabinet-level position, secretary of education, was created to ensure oversight of ESEA and to ensure all students were receiving a proper level of education and educational standards were being met (Goodlad, 1997).

As efforts were being made to improve quality education to all students in America, specifically focusing on minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged, other groups were also making moves to obtain equal access to education. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 guaranteed that all students with disabilities would be provided with a free public education and would receive free services to meet their special education needs. Prior to the passage of 94-142, more than one million students were denied free public education due to their disability, and many more students were only provided a limited education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
While the ESEA had made improvements to the educational system and allowed for greater access to a standards-based curriculum, it was far from perfect. Less than two decades after ESEA passed, it came under national criticism in a report titled *A Nation at Risk* stating that the quality of the nation’s education was decreasing due to a lowering of rigor and standards in the attempt to make the education provided equitable for all. A recommendation from the commission was to make the standards stronger by increasing the rigor of the curriculum being delivered (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Wallender (2014) stated, “This standards-based education, however, would not yet be synonymous with creating common educational standards” (p. 9).

In 1994, President Clinton signed into law the Improving America’s School Act, which brought approximately $11 billion to K-12 public education over a 5-year period. The act would focus on changes that were considered most significant to public education. The act is most notably recognized for its Title 1 program, funneling extra funding to schools where there was a disproportionately high number of disadvantaged students (“Summary of the Improving America’s School Act,” 1994).

At the turn of the century came a new turn in academic accountability and assessment. During the first year of NCLB (2001-2002), states began shifting their focus to state assessments that would align with state standards, a new direction that would ensure students would perform well as determined by preset achievement levels (American Federation of Teachers, 2001). By 2002, all 50 states had adopted and implemented a statewide assessment system that would focus on the state standards. Seventeen of the 50 states considered the assessments to be high stakes, threatening districts with low test scores with school closures or takeovers (Meyer et al., 2002).
While this new accountability system looked promising in regard to increasing academic rigor and ensuring students were provided a standards-based curriculum, it was not without flaws. One of the major problems and complaints about NCLB was that standards varied from state to state. If a child were to move from one state to another state, there would often be a gap in knowledge and curriculum and instruction would be different resulting in frustration from all stakeholders (Newman & Roskos, 2013). This variance in standards and a desire for a more rigorous educational and accountability system ensuring the nation was preparing students for a global community led to the creation of the CCSS in the core subject areas of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics (CCSSI, 2014a):

Every state also had its own definition of proficiency, which is the level at which a student is determined to be sufficiently educated at each grade level and upon graduation. This lack of standardization was one reason why states decided to develop the Common Core State Standards in 2009. (CCSSI, 2014a, p. 1)

In 2009, development of the CCSS began with state-led efforts from 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia. By June of 2014, 43 states, Department of Defense Education Activity, Washington D.C., Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands had adopted the CCSS in both ELA and math and were currently in their first year of implementation at the time of the writing of this paper (CCSSI, 2014a). In the spring of 2015, the first official CCSS assessments for students in Grades 3-8, and 11 was scheduled to be given in California.

Education in America is changing rapidly with transitions from individual state-adopted standards and assessments to the multistate, nationally aligned CCSS, which 43
states and the District of Columbia have adopted as their K-12 educational standards (CCSSI, 2014b). Additionally, many schools and districts are changing the methodology used to educate students, moving toward the integration of technology and inquiry-based curriculum and instruction (Fullan, 2007; Zhang, 2011). With so many changes occurring in education at such a rapid pace (Emmerson, 2005; Kane, 2010; Spitulnik, 2001), it is essential to have strong educational site-based leadership. It is also important to be able to recognize what makes an educational leader successful in order to best meet the needs of students who are being educated under their supervision.

**History of the Role of Superintendent**

With the changes in education as a whole, there have also come changes in the superintendency. Prior to the ESEA in 1965, Callahan (1966) described four periods, or phases, of the superintendency.

**Phase 1—Civil War Until WWI**

The first period was from approximately the time of the Civil War until approximately the beginning of World War I. The first local-level superintendent was appointed in Buffalo, New York in 1837 (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). During this time the superintendent was viewed as a scholarly leader, and the position was held exclusively by men Callahan (1966). Callahan (1966) wrote that the position was a “scholar-educator type—an educational leader and a teacher of teachers” (p. 8).

The superintendent governed the administration of the school and set the tone for its culture (Allison, 1991). The position initially grew slowly but caught on and grew significantly. In 1870, there were only 27 district-level superintendents in the United
States; but by 1915, there were 1,151 superintendents in towns and cities that had a population of over 4,000 (Callahan, 1966).

**Phase 2—The 1920s**

During the next phase, which was seen primarily in the 1920s, the superintendent was best described as a business manager (Callahan, 1966). Local businessmen and elites within the society largely controlled school boards, so it was important for the superintendent to be able to work efficiently with them (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Because of the close working relationship between the school board and the superintendent, the board granted higher level administrative authority to the superintendent so, as Tyack (1974) stated, he or she would be able to “reshape the schools to fit the new economic and social conditions of an urban-industrial society” (p. 126).

It was during this phase when the superintendent also became more heavily involved in budget development and oversight and mainstreaming operations as well as personnel and facility management (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). This time period has also been referred to as the four Bs: bonds, busses, budgets, and buildings (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). This period of the superintendent as business manager concluded when the stock market crashed and the Great Depression hit (Kowalski, 2005).

**Phase 3—1930 to 1954**

During Phase 3, which occurred from approximately 1930 to 1954, the superintendent took on the role of a democratic educational leader, primarily focusing on instruction in democratic schools (Callahan, 1966). Following the Great Depression, recourses became scarce, so the superintendent also became a lobbyist, competing with other publicly funded programs for financial resources (Kowalski, 2006). Annual
contracts were also becoming standardized, so given this new role and the scarcity of resources, the position of the superintendent was becoming more political. Cuban (1988) stated, “No superintendent who wished to survive in the position could ignore for very long the political dimensions of the job” (p. 120).

During this time the superintendent also was becoming more involved with the community. Community engagement was becoming an expected role of the position, and partnerships with stakeholders became commonplace. By the mid-1950s, the superintendent was seen as a public figure (Cuban, 1988; Kowalski, 2005; Leithwood, 1995).

**Phase 4—1955 to 1965**

The last phase up until ESEA (and the time of publishing) was from 1955 to 1965. At this time the superintendent assumed the role of a social scientist, being savvy in politics and economic matters in addition to instructional leadership (Callahan, 1966). There were four major factors that Callahan (1996) attributed to causing the shift from a democratic educational leader to a social scientist. The factors were an increased dissatisfaction with democratic leadership (it was too idealistic), the rapid growth of the social sciences, the work of the Kellogg Foundation (it spent more than seven million dollars on administrative education at eight universities from 1950-1960), and a growing criticism of public education. It was during this time that the superintendent became the spokesperson for the district as well as an advisor to the community (Brunner, Grogan & Bjork, 2002).
1965 Until the Present Time

Once the ESEA was signed into law in 1965, accountability became a new area of focus for superintendents and remains one today. The ESEA and standards that followed required a new level of accountability of student achievement, which would become, in part, a measurement tool of school and district achievement and ultimately the superintendent (Maxwell, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Beginning in the 1960s and well into the 1980s, school reformers and minorities were dissatisfied with the condition public schools were in and focused on the authority of the superintendent; and as Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) noted, superintendents “who would not, or could not, change the educational system (bureaucracy), obstructed equal educational opportunity and reform” (pp. 3-4). In 1991, Crowson and Glass conducted a national study that found about half of the superintendents surveyed said their primary goal was management, while the other half stated leadership was their primary goal. Of the areas they felt they needed to be successful in, they reported politics, finances, organizational structure, and instructional leadership (Crowson & Glass, 1991).

As the new millennium approached, Glass et al. (2000) published an extensive paper looking at the many different aspects of the position of the superintendent and the roles they assumed. Prior to the 1990s, superintendents could easily transition from the role of principal directly to superintendent. Now the majority of superintendents assume district office positions before moving into the office of superintendent; and only about half have even been a high school principal, while historically about 95% of
superintendents were at one point a high school principal. This study also found that superintendents are the primary link between schools and their communities.

**Issues Facing Superintendents**

Superintendents are faced with many issues, as they are the ones who are ultimately responsible for the proper running of the district they oversee and can be compared to the CEO of an organization (Hentze, 2010; Jehlen, 2012). The superintendent faces many pressures from the board and the community the board represents (Bennett et al., 2014; Copeland, 2013; Feuerstein, 2013; Tripses et al., 2013). While superintendents do not have a boss to report directly to, they are held accountable with oversight from the school board, which is made up of elected members from the community and represents the interests of the people living in the community that the district serves (California Education Code, 2015). This is often a very political area, and superintendents need to have the ability to navigate the waters of politics as they aim to meet the needs of all stakeholders (DeNisco, 2013b; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014; Tripses et al., 2013; Young, Cox, & Buckman, 2014). Carter and Cunningham (1997) stated that the position of superintendent is “a hot seat, a pressure cooker, and a high-wire act” (p. 8).

In addition to facing the pressures of board members, community members, and political agendas, the superintendent is also charged with the task of overseeing budgets and finances, being a human resource manager, ensuring high-level instructional leadership, fostering collaboration, and maintaining their personal ethics and values (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Bennett et al., 2014; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014; Samuels, 2012; Tripses et al., 2013; Young et al., 2014).
Budgets and Finance

The school district budget and financial issues related to it are a major area of focus for superintendents. Issues range from balancing budgets in times of recessions to being faced with cutting programs or closing schools to requiring students to pay fees that once may not have existed. Even during stable economic times superintendents are still accountable to strict financial responsibility (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; DeNisco, 2013a, 2013b; Kowalski, 2013; Tripses et al., 2013). Financial issues facing school districts and boards are ranked as the number one issue facing superintendents and have been ranked as the number one issue by every 10-year study that has been conducted by AASA (Glass et al., 2000).

At times superintendents are called to make tough financial decisions such as reorganizing positions within the district. While this can be a hard decision to make, one superintendent said it is sometimes necessary “to better align our systems, improve our decision making and facilitate stronger and more differentiated support of our schools” (Whitmer, 2014, p. 21). However, superintendents were more likely to be seen as authentic leaders if they were transparent in financial decisions and included stakeholders. A positive correlation was found between superintendents being viewed as authentic leaders by stakeholders and transparency in building their budgets. The superintendents who reported themselves as having a high level of authenticity were also the ones who included stakeholders in the budget-building, decision-making process and used data and prescribed methodologies to help drive their budgets (Bird & Wang, 2010; 2011; Bird, Wang, & Murray, 2009).
Pascopella (2011) stated, “Doing more with less is now the standard” (p. 34). Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) said in a 2011 *District Administration* article by Pascopella (2011),

I can’t think of one organization that is under more pressure than urban public schools to improve. . . . That stress is focused on superintendents as the leaders of the organization. And I think that pressure has become more pronounced with budget cuts, pending reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the onset of the new Common Core Standards in reading and math, plus the new assessments that districts need to follow. . . . And everyone wants more and wants it faster at a smaller expense. (Pascopella, 2011, p. 34)

**Politics**

According to Bolman and Deal (2008), effective political leaders make clear what they want and what they can get, assess distribution of power and interests, connect and collaborate with all stakeholders, persuade first, negotiate second, and use coercion only if necessary. Political leaders, such as superintendents, are charged with the high task of doing what is considered ethically right; as Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) stated, “The courage of leadership, including political leadership, is not to do what is easy or expedient, but to do what is right” (p. 77) and then being positive about the way they lead. Bolman and Deal (2008) stated, “We empower ourselves by discovering a positive way of being political. The line between positive and negative politics is a tightrope we have to walk” (p. 224).

When it comes to the flow of politics, Lutz (1996) suggested that local school district politics often follow a predictable path:
1. The community becomes dissatisfied with school policies.

2. Incumbents on the board lose in the election.

3. The new board fires the superintendent.

4. New policies and programs are established, and the district re-turns to a period of stability. (p. 100)

Political pressures are also shown to shape how superintendents form their instructional policy decisions. Trujillo (2013) found that when stakeholders are divided on priorities there could be rebellion against policy. The example given was when the superintendent and other district leaders went against the desire of the teachers and site-based leadership in order to pacify other stakeholders, the site-based personnel would not comply with instructional policies because they felt the superintendent made the policy to keep other stakeholders happy while not upholding controversial instructional policy the teachers wanted. The superintendent often needs to be able to keep multiple stakeholders happy when oftentimes they will not agree on particular policy. Due to this, a superintendent will often make decisions that might not be the best decision, compromising such things as equity and rigor, but is likely to pacify all parties (Trujillo, 2013).

While navigating the political arena as a superintendent can be difficult, being proactive instead of reactive and using marketing can help make things easier. There are four suggestions that can help a superintendent appear in a positive light to his or her community. The first would be to speak up but do not let the talking come from the superintendent. The author suggests letting parents and community members or other people in the district have an opportunity to share their positive stories. The
superintendent should encourage them to do so, all the while remaining available to speak to those who need to be heard. Next, connect with the community by getting involved with the local chamber or serve on community boards. The goal is to get out there and serve the community while making positive connections. Third, the superintendent should go statewide and be a resource to local and state government officials. Get to know them and ask to present when there is a topic that needs expert insight. The superintendent can also offer to host events that legislators enjoy attending—do something for them that lets them know their work is appreciated. Finally, it is suggested to know the media. Meet with local newspaper staff regularly and get to know them. Give them good news and be available. Do not wait to speak to them until there is a controversial issue that has come to the attention of the media. These four suggestions can help a superintendent be proactive with stakeholders, staying in the positive political light (Gae Neal, 2014).

Community Relations

Involvement in the community is a very important role of the superintendent for many reasons. According to Kowalski, Young, and Petersen (2013), “Superintendent involvement in the local community has been advocated for philosophical, professional, and political reasons” (p. 4). While the superintendent has many responsibilities within the organization, it is important that he or she does not neglect to reach out to all stakeholders and address their needs within the district. Community members expect the superintendent to be the professional leader, improving the state of the school while also serving as a public employee and listening to the needs of all stakeholders (Wirt & Kirst, 2005). The community is a vital part of the school district as an organization, and
keeping in good standing with the community and its stakeholders through frequent and effective communication along with encouraged involvement is critical for the superintendent (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Bennett et al., 2014; Copeland, 2013; Feuerstein, 2013; Whitmer, 2014).

Bolla (2010) studied superintendent community involvement and found that females who worked in urban school districts were more likely to have a higher level of involvement within the community. However, when comparing superintendents in rural and nonrural districts as a whole, it was found that superintendents in rural districts were shown to have higher levels of community involvement (Kowalski et al., 2013).

Whitmer (2014) acknowledged the many components of being a superintendent, including the importance of the community. One person she interviewed suggested having an “entry plan focused on school board relations, critical issue analysis, and effective communication and community engagement” (p. 21) and that this will help the superintendent to be on the proactive side of the coin (as opposed to reactive) and establishes the importance of the relationship with the board as well as involving the community with effective communication (Whitmer, 2014). Kowalski et al. (2013) found that if a superintendent considers community involvement to be important, he or she will be more involved in the community.

**School Board Relations**

The superintendent-school board relationship is not always an easy one. Moody (2007) wrote, “Given the complex and often ambiguous nature of school governance, it is appropriate to characterize superintendent-board relations as being problematic (p. 35). However, if the superintendent and school board are able to uphold a positive and stable
partnership, it is more likely for the schools to show positive outcomes (The Center for Public Education, 2011).

The Center for Public Education (2011) lists eight characteristics of school boards that are considered to be effective. They are the following:

1. Commitment to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction and define clear goals toward that vision

2. Strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and of the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels

3. Accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement

4. Have a collaborative relationship with staff and the community and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving district goals

5. Are data savvy: they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and use it to drive continuous improvement

6. Align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet district goals

7. Lead as a united team with the superintendent, each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust

8. Take part in team development and training, sometimes with their superintendents, to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts. (p. 1)
The Center for Public Education (2011) suggests that boards who demonstrate the previously mentioned characteristics can provide other school districts an example of success.

When looking further into the working relationship between the board and the superintendent, S. M. Johnson (1996) found in a study of 12 superintendents that all of the superintendents studied reported the same areas of focus about working with the board:

- Establishing appropriate and workable boundaries between the board and the central office, avoiding destructive public conflict, framing problems in ways that would elicit attention and action, promoting orderly and constructive decision making, converting political opponents into allies, and fostering collaboration among adversaries. (p. 169)

Superintendents are held accountable to the school board, and many superintendents undergo annual evaluations. An extensive study conducted in 2000 found that 91% of school boards rated their superintendents as good or excellent on their evaluations with the majority coming in as excellent. When asked to rate their personal effectiveness, 95% of superintendents rated themselves as good or excellent. Interestingly, though, when superintendents were asked to rate the adequacy of their boards, 30% sated that their boards were not qualified (Glass et al., 2000). Sharp (2012) noted in a recent study that when interacting with the board or when some is called upon to speak, the superintendent is most often the chief spokesperson.
Internal Relations

The superintendent must create and maintain positive working relationships with school district employees (both certificated and classified) as well as unions (Copeland, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Harvey, Holland, & Cummins, 2013; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Mitgang, 2012). Strong relationships with the union are a critical component of internal relations for the superintendent. Sawchuk, (2012) stated, “Forming a relationship with the union was not a luxury, it was an absolute necessity” (p. 9). Superintendents play a significant role in the relationship with the union. If they are able to collaborate effectively over the long term, results such as increased union-district office personnel collaboration and increased student achievement are likely to become evident (Dubin, 2014).

One very important yet sometimes challenging role the superintendent must assume is that of human resource management. Human resources play a critical role in school districts, ranging from recruitment to payroll to labor relations (Copeland, 2013; Council of the Great City Schools, 2008). As part of human resource management, it is also important for the superintendent to have a positive and collaborative working relationship with the principals who are responsible for managing the school sites within the district. For many decades now it has been documented that successful schools require strong leadership from the principal (Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2008). Research has also shown that when it comes to the success of a school, often measured by student achievement, the teacher has the most significant effect, followed only by the school principal (Harvey et al., 2013; Mitgang, 2012).
In addition to the superintendent needing to maintain positive relationships with the union, certificated staff, and site administrators, it is also very important for the superintendent to foster a positive relationship with classified staff. According to Charnley Eveland (2015),

Classified school employees have a hand in nearly every aspect of education. They maintain and clean the buildings and grounds, fix and serve meals, aid in classrooms, provide technology and media services and provide administrative support, safe transportation, secure and healthy environments and many other specialized services. (p. 1)

**External Relations**

Superintendents are faced with the responsibility to build strong working relationships with external organizations that reach beyond their school district. Educational responsibilities follow a linear pattern, beginning at the national level in the example of educational acts such as ESEA; but states are also responsible for the performance of their students. From the state level responsibility is passed down to lower levels such as county offices and then districts (Addi-Raccah, 2015). Williams (2010) stated that educational leaders (such as the superintendent) are known as boundary spanners—individuals who must reach beyond their internal organization to external organizations to accomplish a goal or task; thus, according to Addi-Raccah (2015), superintendents must be able “to collaborate with their environments and bring together for collective action a range of external factors from different backgrounds, interests and world views” (p. 290).
In addition to dealing directly with county, state, and federal educational agencies, superintendents are also faced with interacting with legislators, oftentimes due to the need for increased funding. A recent example was from Colorado where almost all of the superintendents from the state’s 178 districts decided they needed to band together to petition legislators for extra funding due to the increased pressures of recent educational changes and expectations (Torres, 2014).

**Collaboration**

Being able to collaborate successfully with multiple stakeholders is a critical component with the role of the superintendent. Superintendents must interface with several different groups such as the school board, site-level administrators, instructional leaders, district office personnel, and community members. While oftentimes the needs of each group may be unique, the outcome of collaborative efforts have a ripple effect on other areas within the organization (Bennett et al., 2014; Copeland, 2013; Demski, 2013; Szczesiul, 2014; Tripses et al., 2013; Whitmer, 2014).

Superintendents tend to favor collaboration with community members, school stakeholders, and the public. The superintendent plays a significant role in the development and sustainment of those relationships and is important for building the capacity to enact positive change within the school district (Bennett & Thompson, 2011). Collaboration is important between the superintendent and each stakeholder group. As a result of collaboration between the superintendent and site-level administration, Szczesiul (2014) stated, “administrators identified shared priorities across the district” (p. 431). Superintendents are seen as a “leader of leaders”; and when they are able to foster, encourage, and implement effective collaboration among their teams of administrative
leaders, they in turn are able to continue the work of collaboration on school sites within the district, sending the same message to teachers, students, and parents. When this happens effectively, superintendents are able to increase student academic performance while winning the trust of the community (Griffin, 2011).

**Instructional Leadership**

With increased attention and focus on instructional leadership, Plotts and Gutmore (2014) suggested, “With the increased pressures of accountability, the superintendency has become more of a Jack-of-all-Trades manager than [only] an instructional leader” (p. 34). However, instructional leadership has been one of the primary roles of the superintendent for over a century and still holds true to this day (Crowson & Glass, 1991; Glass et al., 2000; K. Wagner, 2010). Instructional leadership is captured in four of the 11 standards for superintendents as outlined in the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, thus making it a predominantly important area of focus (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014).

Some of the major issues within instructional leadership that superintendents face are the integration of technology, assessment and accountability, school climate, and maintaining a professional learning community (Axelson, 2010; Beard, 2013; Domenech, 2014; Young et al., 2014). It is worth noting, however, that while the majority of superintendents indicated that instructional leadership is a top priority of their position, the reality is that since they are faced with an overwhelming amount of other responsibilities it is difficult for even the most committed superintendent to devote a significant amount of time to this area. One suggestion was to leverage external support in this area to encourage internal accountability (Bredeson & Kose, 2007).
Whitt, Scheurich, and Skrla (2015) in their study found that superintendents who encouraged and supported their leadership teams and instructional leaders to attend professional development observed noticeable student academic achievement over time. This study also suggested that to achieve a greater level of achievement and to improve instructional practices, the superintendent should make it a priority to collaborate with the board, community, and other stakeholders on issues affecting student performance and equity and to work together to implement school reforms (Whitt et al., 2015).

When it comes to the success of a school, success is often measured by student achievement; the teacher has the most significant effect followed only by the school principal (Harvey et al., 2013; Mitgang, 2012). Given that teachers play such a significant part in student and thereby school success, Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) stated, “It is essential to improve our understanding of teacher characteristics that predict their subsequent performance” (p. 23). Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) suggested grit as a predictor of new teacher success and suggested this character trait should be taken into consideration when hiring new teachers. In addition to having grit as a personal characteristic, superintendents, according to Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth, need to look for this characteristic in both teachers and principals.

**Personal Ethics and Values**

Successful leadership has been linked to ethical behavior. The actions the leader displays set the ethical standards of the organization (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996). Burns (1978) claimed that ethics is just as important to the leader or an organization as decision making and the supervision of subordinates. Leaders who want to be effective must have strong ethical values and be ready to always stand up for them. They must
also be seen as trustworthy, which happens through the building of credibility and the maintaining of integrity (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Educational leaders must establish and display integrity with their staff and students (England, 2014).

According to DuFour and Marzano (2011), “Every educator confronts a moral imperative to seek the most promising strategies for helping every student achieve at high levels” (p. 11). It is important that the superintendent not only be aware of their own ethics and values but also be able to clearly and effectively share them with all stakeholders and have actions that confirm what they are saying (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Howard and Korver (2008) cautioned readers to take their ethical code seriously and to know what it is, stating, “Temptation is everywhere—and so is compromise” (p. 5); and to make sure one does not ruin anything from his or her reputation to his or her career, it is imperative that one “draw bright ethical lines to consistently guide right action” (p. 3).

High (2005) conducted a study that asked participants to prioritize a list of ethical principles that they felt were important to educational leadership. Results from the study ranked critical thinking as the most important ethical principle for an educational leader to have. The researcher suggested that critical thinking was ranked highest, because “critical thinking is a complex and multi-dimensional process that is recognized as an attribute of moral development at the highest stages” (High, 2005, p. 78). England (2014) also found in his research on ethics and leadership that participants recognized the necessity to develop critical thinking skills.

The position of the superintendent demands that the individual be a person of high moral character and integrity while being able to effectively run an organization that has
many moving parts. The superintendent must be trustworthy and able to make ethical decisions (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). In addition to having strong personal ethics and values, it is also important to be able to set an example, because the “superintendent . . . must play a critical role in building a district culture of integrity that maximizes students’ ethical development” (Mirk, 2011, p. 2).

Need for Strong Leadership

Strong leadership from the office of the superintendent is paramount to the success of the district. Superintendents are faced with many challenges and are required to have a wide range of skills and abilities to effectively lead their schools (Asher-Schapiro, 2015; Bennett, McKee, & Martin, 2014; Cheung, 2013). Cheung (2013) supported this and commented on the need for superintendents to be strong leaders stating,

Education continues to shift due to internal and external factors, calling for reexamination of current practices in school districts. The demands of the position call for superintendents to continue to employ effective strategies and to master a multitude of skills to lead the school district. (pp. 84-85)

Stitt (2010) made the point that the leadership of superintendents has proven to play a key role in the success or failure of the schools they oversee.

In the United States, only 70% of high school seniors are graduating high school, which is considerably low when compared to Japan that has a 93% graduation rate and Denmark that has a 96% graduation rate (T. Wagner, 2010). Having a vision and then being able to share that vision and make it their own is a skill leaders must have if they want to enact change. It is therefore vital that superintendents employ personnel who
share their vision and will work to ensure all students are able to graduate (Asrani, 2010). Having a clear vision and being able to have others buy into the vision is something superintendents are challenged with in order to be successful in their leadership position (Bennett et al., 2014). Kouzes and Posner (2007) were able to identify five practices of high-performing leaders, one of which focuses on vision. These practices included modeling, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. Leaders (superintendents) who are able to successfully engage in all five areas are able to more effectively lead their districts and enact change than those who are not (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Being able to inspire staff and have them catch the vision is no easy task, yet as Bumphus (2008) stated, “School leaders who possess the capacity to handle the cognitive, emotional, and physical demands of the job are invaluable to the sustained success of schools” (p. 85).

The way the superintendent leads and his or her level of effectiveness has a direct impact on the schools within the district. High levels of student achievement can also be linked to effective leadership from the superintendent (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) stated that in order for leaders to be most effective, they need to use both transactional and transformational leadership approaches with their subordinates. Of the two mentioned leadership styles, Leithwood et al. (2008) found that the most effective educational leaders were transformational leaders who focused on four main leadership areas which included creating and maintain vision, developing individuals, transforming the organization, and managing teaching and learning.

Effective leadership of superintendents was examined, and it was found that the superintendents who were surveyed all self-reported high levels of transformational
leadership behaviors. Many of these superintendents also lead districts that reported high levels of student achievement. Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommended that superintendents of low-performing districts receive professional development in the area of transformation leadership (Fenn & Mixon, 2011).

**High Turnover**

One of the challenges superintendents face is a significantly high turnover rate. Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported alarming numbers of turnover of superintendents. They found that the average amount of time a superintendent stays in his or her position is only 5 1/2 years and that almost half—42% of all superintendents—stay with their district for 3 years or less, while the national turnover is about 17% a year. In 2011, in an article published in *District Administration*, Pascopella (2011) stated that the 2011 survey showed that only 51% of the superintendents surveyed said they would still be a superintendent by the year 2015. The article suggested several reasons for the high turnover rate, some of which being that there would be retirements, but also that superintendents face many pressures from their boards, they desire a new challenge, and some decide to move on due to burnout or other opportunities (Pascopella, 2011).

Pascopella also stated, “District leaders who focus on the right goals, manage change effectively and stick around long enough to see results tend to have higher-performing students” (p. 32).

Pascopella (2011) further reported the following:

It’s become very apparent, and the research is strong in that area, that one of the key elements in running a successful district is stability. So if you have a revolving door, it’s counterproductive, and there’s never a chance to establish
reforms or create programs that make a difference. Even a three-year period of
time is inadequate. (p. 1)

It is essential for the stability of education to identify character traits that will contribute
to longer employment of superintendents in the positions they hold.

**Leadership Styles**

The leadership styles of transformational leadership and transactional leadership
originated when a study was conducted to examine the leadership styles of mass political
movements (Burns, 1978). Since then much research has been conducted on the subject
of dominate leadership styles, and leadership styles have been narrowed down to
transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire (Bass, 1985, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1997;
Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). It is worth noting that while each leadership style
is distinctly different, when individuals are surveyed, it is possible for them to display the
leadership styles in different amounts and intensities on a leadership continuum (Bass et
al., 2003; Scandara & Schriesheim, 1994). Leadership styles are influenced by a variety
of factors, and MacDonald (2012) stated, “Leader behavior is impacted by the traits and
skills of the leader, the traits and behaviors of the follower, the complexity of the
relationship, and numerous other variables, some of which may be currently
undiscovered” (p. 122).

A transformational leader can be characterized as a person who is able to inspire
change in an individual or organization by creating meaningful relationships that create
and build trust. By doing so the leader is able to move subordinates together toward a
goal and then attainment of that goal (Barlow, Jordan, & Hendrix, 2003; Bass 1985; Yukl
1999). Additionally, a transformational leader is able to motivate subordinates in such a
way that they will put the interests of the organization before self-interests (Bass, 1985).

To help better define the characteristics of transformational leaders, Kouzes and Posner (1987) identified 10 characteristics that transformational leaders will exhibit:

1. Search for challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate and improve.
2. Experiment, take risks, and learn from the accompanying mistakes.
3. Envision an uplifting and ennobling future.
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams.
5. Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.
6. Strengthen others by sharing information and power and increasing their discretion and visibility.
7. Set an example for others by behaving in ways that are consistent with your stated values.
8. Plan small wins that promote consistent progress and build commitment.
9. Recognize individual contributions to the success of every project.
10. Celebrate team accomplishments regularly

Transactional leadership was first defined by Burns (1978) as a barter-like relationship between a supervisor and subordinate. Bass (1985) expanded on this definition by adding that those involved in transactional leadership often experience an exchange between the supervisor and subordinate, resulting in contingent material and personal rewards based on performance. It has also been described as reward-driven behavior (Field & Herold, 1997) and can be used by leaders to set standards and expectations (Bass, 1990; Yukl, 2002).
Bass (1990) described laissez-faire leadership as the most ineffective style of leadership, noting that there is no true leadership, and ineffective interaction between the leader and subordinates will exist. The leader who operates under this approach often does not take responsibility, is indecisive, does not provide adequate feedback to subordinates, and does not meet the needs of subordinates (Hoy & Miskel, 2010, Northouse, 2007).

**Supervisor and Subordinate Relationships**

It is important that supervisors are people oriented, because the success of the organization is based largely on how well individuals in management treat people as valuable assets. A study of over 12,000 managers confirmed this by showing a correlation between the success of managers and their attitudes toward employees (Lussier & Achua, 2012).

According to Avolio and Bass (1998), individuals who are considered to be transformational leaders are “fully transformational to the extent they continually adjust their behavior to the level to which the subordinate has been developed” (p. 62). It is therefore important for a transformational leader to gain feedback from their employees and understand what their needs are, which can be done by encouraging subordinates to speak up (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010).

It is important for there to be trust and professional respect among supervisors and subordinates. A correlation has shown to exist between high subordinate performance and relations-oriented behaviors. It was also shown that this becomes stronger when a high level of professional respect exists (Oborn, 2010). However, Oborn (2010) stated,
“When contribution and professional respect are low, increases in task-oriented behaviors are related to decreases in performance” (p. 50).

Superintendents are the ultimate supervisors, as they are the CEO of the organization (Hentze, 2010; Jehlen, 2012). The supervisor-subordinate relationship, or in this case the relationship a superintendent has with employees, is a very important element to the success of the superintendent. There must be trust, open two-way communication, and respect for all subordinates and what they contribute to the organization.

**Personality Traits**

Personality traits were defined by J. A. Johnson (1997) as “consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, or actions that distinguish people from one another” (p. 74). The Big Five personality traits are the five umbrella personality traits that people fit into (McCrae & Costa, 1990). The Big Five was based on numerous amounts of research starting with Fiske in 1949, being officially labeled by Goldberg in 1981 (John & Srivastava, 1999), and the Five-Factor Inventory developed in 1895 (Costa & McCrae, 1985). The Big Five Personality traits are agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism (sometimes also termed emotional stability), extraversion, and openness to experience (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1992; Goldberg, 1992; John & Srivastava, 1999; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002; Shi, Lin, Wang, & Wang, 2009). John and Srivastava (1999) stated the following:

The Big Five structure does not imply that personality differences can be reduced to only five traits. Rather, these five dimensions represent personality at the
broadest level of abstraction, and each dimension summarizes a large number of distinct, more specific personality characteristics. (p. 7)

The first personality trait described is agreeableness. Agreeableness refers to how well a person interacts with others and can be considered trusting, good-natured, forgiving, and soft-hearted (McCrae & Costa, 1992). According to Giberson et al. (2009), “Leaders who have high levels of agreeableness seem likely to foster an environment of cooperation and be concerned about the development of employees (p. 126).

The next character trait is conscientiousness and of the five is closest related to grit. The character trait of conscientiousness can be described as thoughtfulness, reliable and trustworthy, attention to detail, and organized (Srivastava, 2010). It was further described by Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, and Barrick (1999) as “achievement orientation (hardworking and persistent), dependability (responsible and careful), and orderliness (planful and organized)” (p. 624). McCrae and Costa (1985) suggested that conscientiousness helps the development of self-discipline and motivation.

Another unique personality trait is emotional stability. Emotional stability refers to both the positive and negative control over one’s own emotions and can be linked to the ability to cope with stress (Shi et al., 2009). In early research, the term more often used for the trait was neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1985, 1990). Neuroticism refers to a negative regulation of emotional stability and can be used to measure a person’s well-being or emotional stability (McCrae & Costa, 1992).

Extroversion is also one of the Big Five and refers to “being sociable, gregarious, assertive, talkative, and active” (Barrick & Mount, 1991, p. 3). A person who is
considered to be an extrovert is often dominant, ambitious, and assertive (Watson & Clark, 1997). Those who score low in extroversion are considered to be reserved, independent, and even paced (McCrae & Costa, 1992).

The final trait of the Big Five is openness to experience. Openness to experience refers to those who have an intellectual curiosity and can be considered to be creative, imaginative, curious, and original (McCrae & Costa, 1992). People who score low in this area “tend to be conventional in behavior and conservative in outlook. They prefer the familiar to the novel, and their emotional responses are somewhat muted” (Costa & McCrae, 1992, p. 15).

Of the Big Five, conscientiousness is the trait that has been closely linked to grit (Mangan, 2012). It often relates to job performance, and people who score high on conscientiousness, Mangan (2012) related, “tend to be more organized and responsible, more likely to follow through on their obligations, and more likely to follow rules” (p. 4). Additionally, managers also tend to score high in the area of extroversion, noting that they are sociable and assertive (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The five-factor model and the research that supports it, Wong-Chin (1996) stated, offers a theoretical framework that connects the patterns of the behaviors of administrators to the behaviors that effective leaders demonstrate.

**Resiliency**

According to Cesarone (1999), “Resilience is the human capacity and the ability to face, overcome, be strengthened by, and even be transformed by experiences of adversity” (p. 12). To further expand on this definition, Castro and Johnson (2008) said that resiliency is having the ability and skills that encourage (a) self-awareness and
acceptance, (b) the establishment of healthy supportive relationships, (c) interpersonal skills, and (d) coping skills to help with the demands and pressures of daily life. In essence, resiliency is the second half of the definition of grit, as grit is defined by Duckworth et al. (2007) as “perseverance and passion for long term goals despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress (p. 1087).

Providing support to individuals will encourage them to overcome setbacks and obstacles and oftentimes be strengthened by the situation. Rosenfeld and Richman (1997) listed seven supports one can offer for maximizing resiliency.

1. Listening support
2. Emotional support
3. Tangible assistance
4. Task appreciation
5. Reality confirmation
6. Emotional challenge
7. Task challenge

Papatreianou and Le Cornu (2014) supported this research by stating, “By receiving these types of support they reported feeling more confident and competent” (p. 111). It is also worth noting that a key finding from the study included the following: “In every category of support, there was evidence of both personal and professional relationships” (p. 111).

Some suggest that resilience can be considered an individual trait while others suggest that it is a process. Based on an extensive literature review, resilience as a process is much less studied then resilience as a character trait (Jacelon, 1997). Wagnild
and Young (1993) created a resilience scale, and that instrument measures resilience as a trait. Those who are successful often demonstrate the character trait of resiliency and are known to deal effectively with stress and overcome setbacks. They plan out what they want to accomplish and anticipate setbacks; they plan to persevere until they reach their goal (Mangan, 2012).

A concept synthesis was conducted on resilience, and from her findings Polk (1997) created a middle-range theory of resilience. She classified the characteristics of resilience into four patterns: the dispositional pattern, the relational pattern, the situational pattern, and the philosophical pattern. The dispositional pattern refers to physical and ego-related psychosocial attributes and includes intelligence, health, temperament, sense of awareness, self-worth, and high self-esteem. The relational pattern refers to intrinsic and extrinsic relationships. Intrinsic relationships are those that are close and personal, as extrinsic relationships are those that are more social in nature. The situational pattern addresses cognitive appraisal skills, problem-solving ability, and how one takes action in situations. Polk (1997) stated,

[This pattern] includes an awareness of what can and cannot be accomplished and the capacity to specify more limited goals, to perceive changes in the world, to use active problem-oriented coping, and to reflect on new situations. Flexibility, perseverance, and resourcefulness all contribute to this aspect of the pattern of resilience. (p. 5)

The last pattern, the philosophical pattern, is that of one’s personal beliefs—the way a person views experiences and his or her outlook on life.
Low (2010) stated, “Research in the area of resilience has concentrated primarily on personal resilience and the individual’s ability to overcome challenges and obstacles which may be present in their lives” (p. 33). Resilience over time has been studied (Beardslee, 1989; Werner, 1989) and it has been found that depending on the developmental stage of the individual, factors that contribute to resilience can change while some factors remain the same. The educational environment plays a role in the development of resilience, as Henderson and Milstein (2003) noted,

More than any institution except the family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency in today’s youth and tomorrow’s adults. Achieving the stated goals of academic and life success for all students and an enthusiastic, motivated, change oriented staff involves increasing student and staff resiliency. (p. 2)

However, the authors noted the importance of school staff modeling resiliency if the intention was to have students be resilient. They stated, “Resilient students need resilient educators. . . . It is unrealistic to expect students to be resilient if educators are not” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, p. 47).

Resilient leaders are essential for high-functioning originations to be successful (Bumphus, 2008; Hoffman, 2004). It was found that leaders who received coaching were reported to be more resilient due to the external support offered by the coach, especially during times when the leader was facing a challenge (Smith, 2015). Additionally, research has shown that there is a positive correlation between transformational leadership and resilience (Wasden, 2014).
Perseverance

Perseverance can be described as directed effort over time (Pickett et al., 2000). After extensive research on character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) described perseverance as “voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties, or discouragement” (p. 229). Mega-church pastor and author Joel Osteen (2005) described perseverance: “God loves to use ordinary people just like you and me to do extraordinary things. You may not feel capable in your own strength, but that’s okay [because] when we are weak, He is strong” (p. 62).

Along the lines of Joel Osteen, and perhaps the foundation of the message he was trying to convey, is the fact that perseverance is not a new concept but was discussed in several letters in the New Testament of the Bible, written nearly 2,000 years ago. For example, Romans 5:3-4 (New International Version) says, “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” Furthermore, 2 Thessalonians 1:4 reads, “Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring.” Hebrews 12:1 reads, “And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” James 1:4 says, “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” Revelation 2:19 says, “I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.” Clearly perseverance is nothing new and has been an encouraged character trait for many generations.

Coming back to current times, Ericsson and Charness (1994) suggested that successful people have an innate ability that causes them to be inclined to continue
practicing a skill until they have mastered it; the researchers called this perseverance. When a person sees a problem as difficult or challenging, they will continue to work at it (Clarke & Clarke, 2003; Martin, 2003). Thus, perseverance toward a goal will increase the likelihood of one attaining that goal, and training can result in greater perseverance (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The character trait of perseverance is a trait that is beneficial to individuals across a lifespan. Children can develop perseverance in educational settings, sports, and learning to play instruments. They must practice and continue to stay with a task in order to master it and attain goals (Boyce, 2011). The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology (2013) noted that classrooms could be designed in such a way to promote and encourage perseverance. Even the new CCSS for mathematics state in the first standard for mathematical practice that students should “make sense of problems and persevere in solving them” (CCSSI, 2014a). Farrington et al. (2012) described academic perseverance as pursuing academic goals with effort and focus despite setbacks or obstacles that might occur.

Interestingly, people are more likely to demonstrate perseverance if they see the task as fun or are motivated to attain the outcome (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). Hope has also been attributed to perseverance, and research showed that when hope increased so did perseverance (Boyce, 2011). Boyce (2011) stated, “When someone has high levels of hope, it may help to increase perseverance towards goals. It is also possible that when someone perseveres towards a goal, they develop more hope as they get closer to achieving the goal” (p. 62). However, to be able to persevere and achieve goals, one must have a goal he or she is passionate about and not give up. According to Abella
(2011), “To warrant perseverance you must have a clearly defined goal you are chasing” (p. 275).

Many people begin tasks with strong intent to complete them but then do not. Individuals who believe in their abilities and their efforts, when they are unable to meet the challenge set before them, will apply more effort. Individuals who do not believe in their ability will decline in their efforts and give up (Bandura, 1997). Perseverance has been shown to increase when individuals receive verbal praises and accolades (Boone, 2011), and creative problem solving has been shown to support perseverance (Williams, 2014). Williams (2014) stated, “Perseverance during problem solving involves finding ways to proceed toward successes when situations are unfamiliar and a clear pathway is not apparent” (p. 420).

**Grit**

Grit is a character trait that was first introduced in 2007 by Duckworth et al. and is described as “perseverance and passion of long-term goals . . . working strenuously towards challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). Grit is broken down into two components: perseverance of effort and consistency of interests over time (Duckworth et al., 2007). The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology (2013) defined grit as “perseverance to accomplish long-term or higher-order goals in the face of challenges and setbacks, engaging the student’s psychological resources, such as their academic mindsets, effortful control, and strategies and tactics” (p. 15). Additionally, Hogan (2013) stated, “The single most common element—and the
most commonly used synonym—of grit is perseverance” (p. 6). The two main elements of grit can also be viewed as perseverance and resilience.

The initial study on grit found that grittier individuals are more successful in attaining educational goals, college grade point average (GPA), retention of West Point cadets, and National Spelling Bee rankings. The study also found that IQ alone is not a predictor of success as once believed. An additional finding of the study showed that there was a strong correlation between grit and the Big Five character trait of conscientiousness (Duckworth et al., 2007). Simply put, “The gritty individual stays the course” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1088).

Gladwell (2008) stated in his book, Outliers: The Story of Success, that in order for a person to master a skill, they need to put in at least 10,000 hours of practice. This high level of commitment to mastering a skill is the essence of grit, noting that within those 10,000 hours there are setbacks and plateaus that one must be willing to push through and overcome, yet those who do become some of the most successful people. Hogan (2013) also concluded that the women she studied who were determined to be the grittiest were the ones who put in the longest hours. Duckworth et al. (2007) also found through their research that people who demonstrate grit are the ones who put in numerous hours of practice and do not give up.

There have been several studies that show the connection between a high level of grit and success while also exploring the different components of grit. These studies have focused on the retention of first-year military cadets (Maddi et al., 2012); middle school National Spelling Bee contestants (Duckworth et al., 2011); successful women in Big Law (Hogan, 2013); engagement, meaning, and happiness (Von Culin et al., 2014);
and success in education and the workplace and educational leadership (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

Shortly after the initial study and introduction of grit (Duckworth et al., 2007), Duckworth and Quinn (2009) released a study further confirming the relationship between grit and success; but this time the authors looked at education and the workplace. They found that grit is a better predictor of college success than grade point average. In other words, students who put in the many hours of hard work and studying in high school are more likely to be successful in college rather than just those who have high GPAs without the hours of studying behind it (Duckworth & Quinn 2009).

To better understand the concept of grit as it relates to success, Duckworth et al. (2011) conducted a study that focused on middle school National Spelling Bee contestants. They followed the study habits of contestants and found that frequent deliberate practice (which most closely mirrored competition) was a predictor of success during competition. The researchers concluded that grit—perseverance and passion for long-term goals (in this case deliberate practicing of spelling words in order to win the National Spelling Bee; Duckworth et al., 2007) was worth putting in the hours of the type of practice that is considered less enjoyable but more effective (Duckworth et al., 2011).

Only a year after the aforementioned study was published, Maddi et al. (2012) published a study examining the retention of first-year military cadets. The study measured and found that the Whole Candidate Score, hardiness, and grit were all predictors of retention. The interesting thing about this study is that of the three factors mentioned, grit had the largest effect (Maddi et al., 2012).
Hogan (2013) built on this work by examining the correlation between grit and successful women in Big Law. She found that grit is in fact a contributing factor to the success of women in Big Law, due in part to a high number of hours put into the practice.

A recent study was published that examined the components of grit: perseverance of effort and consistency of interests over time (Duckworth et al., 2007) with how people approach happiness in life, specifically focusing on pleasure, meaning, and engagement (Von Culin et al., 2014). Results from the study showed, “Grittier individuals were more likely than less gritty individuals to seek happiness through engagement . . . were more likely to seek meaning . . . and individuals who seek pleasure in life were less gritty than their more stoic peers” (Von Culin et al., 2014, p. 310). However, it is worth noting that the differences between those who identified themselves as gritty and those who did not identify with the character trait were mostly small- to medium-sized effects (Von Culin et al., 2014).

Due to a high number of teachers (approximately 50%) leaving the profession within the first 5 years, Robertson-Kraft and Duckworth (2014) decided to conduct a study to determine if teacher “retention and effectiveness among novice teachers in their first and second year of teaching can be predicted by differences in grit” p. 2). The researchers found that grit is a predictor of retention and effectiveness and made the suggestion that grit should be a factor to consider during the interview process. They also suggested that grit should not just be measured on a questioner but should also be examined by looking at the applicant’s “sustained engagement and advancement in prior activities and work experience” (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014, p. 22).
While most of the studies on grit mentioned tend to look at the success of people who would presumably have a high IQ (National Spelling Bee contestants, women in Big Law, those in leadership positions), it is important to note that success is not just based on IQ but on grit as well. Duckworth et al. (2007) set in motion the notion that IQ is not the only predictor of success: “Grit may be as essential as IQ to high achievement. In particular, grit, more than self-control or conscientiousness, may set apart the exceptional individuals” (p. 1089). Gladwell (2008) further made the point that IQ does not determine success like once was believed and built on the work of Duckworth et al. (2007):

Achievement is talent plus preparation. The problem with this view is that the closer psychologists look at the careers of the gifted, the smaller the role innate talent seems to play and the bigger the role preparation [grit] seems to play.

(Gladwell, 2008, p. 36)

After a thorough review of the literature, the most prominent characteristics that make up the character trait of grit are perseverance, dedication, goal oriented, consistency of interest, and seeking meaning and happiness (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Duckworth et al., 2011; Hogan, 2013; Maddi et al., 2012; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Von Culin et al., 2014). It is also worth noting that the studies from Duckworth are currently the gold standard for the character trait of grit, with no noticeable differences in the general literature on grit.

**Conclusion**

The position of the superintendent has been an integral part of education for over 150 years. History and research have shown that the position, although highly sought
after, comes with the requirement to be able to assume many roles, foster and maintain positive relationships with many stakeholders sometimes with conflicting interests, and demonstrate strong leadership. However, even though there has been extensive research on the success of the superintendent, there has yet to be a study that examines the role that grit plays in superintendent longevity; nor has there been a study to examine if there is a significant difference in self-reported and perceived levels of grit between a supervisor and subordinates.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter is a review of the methodology used to conduct this study, which examines the character trait of grit in California superintendents both as self-reported and as perceived by subordinates. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, and research design. The chapter then provides an extensive overview of the justification for the research design, population, sample, research instruments, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis. The final section covers the methodological assumptions, limitations of the study, and the ethical procedures engaged in to safeguard the protection of human subjects. The chapter concludes with a summary of the overall methodology of this study. Prior to proceeding with this mixed methods study, approval was acquired from the Institutional Review Board at Brandman University.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify and describe the level of grit in California superintendents as indicated by the Duckworth Grit Scale. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine how subordinates view their superintendent’s level of grit. It was also the purpose of this study to determine if a significant difference exists between the ratings of superintendents and subordinates on the Duckworth Grit Scale. The final purpose of this study was to discover how superintendents describe the attributes that contribute to their grittiness.
Research Questions

1. What do California superintendents perceive as their level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?
2. What do superintendents’ subordinates perceive as the superintendent’s level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?
3. Is there a significant difference between self-reported and subordinate-reported perceived levels of grit?
4. What are the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents perceive that contribute to their level of grit?

Research Design

Mixed methods studies are a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research. According to Patton (2002), “At the simplest level, a questionnaire or interview that asks both fixed choice (closed) and open ended questions is an example of how quantitative measurement and qualitative inquiry are often combined” (p. 5). The study follows the explanatory sequential design model where the quantitative method is used first, followed closely by the qualitative method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, “Typically, the main thrust of the study is quantitative, and the qualitative results are secondary” (p. 25). The main purpose of the qualitative portion of the study is to further explain the findings from the previously collected quantitative data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

For this study the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale, which asks fixed-choice questions, was used to measure the superintendents’ level of grit and produce quantitative data. Next, the researcher using open-ended questions to produce qualitative data
interviewed a smaller number of superintendents. Triangulation was then used to strengthen the data. Triangulation occurs when both quantitative and qualitative data are used in a study, and it is ideal in research (Patton, 2002).

**Quantitative Research Design**

In quantitative research, the researcher reports the results as quantities or statistics (Patten, 2012). The 8-Item Grit Scale is a structured instrument that reports results that can be used for statistical analysis. Patten (2012) stated that quantitative researchers often use instruments that contain multiple choice questions or structured questionnaires because they produce data that can easily be reduced to numbers. This research study examines if there is a significant difference in superintendents’ self-reported level of grit and subordinates’ perception of their supervisor’s level of grit.

**Qualitative Research Design**

There are three main types of data collection when doing qualitative research, all which typically come from conducting fieldwork: interviews, observations, and documents. This study focuses on individual interviews. The purpose of interviewing individuals is to get a better understanding of their perspective on the topic to be researched (Patton, 2002). When conducting interviews, Patton (2002) stated, the data “reveals direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (p. 4).

**Population**

Creswell (2008) defined a population as “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). Thus, a population can be any size and come from any particular area. Generally speaking, a researcher would like to gather as much
information as possible from the population for a thorough study. However, time and monetary constraints inhibit researchers from using such large samples. In the case of public school districts in the state of California, there are approximately 1,082 public school districts in California (CDE, 2015), and a superintendent governs each school district; thereby, there are approximately 1,000 superintendents in the state of California. Table 1 shows the number of districts by type in California.

Table 1

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unified</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While there are approximately 1,000 superintendents in California, a study of 1,000 district superintendents would be an unreasonably sized population for this study and therefore needed to be significantly reduced. According to Creswell (2008), “The target population or ‘sampling frame’ is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). The target population for the study was public school district superintendents in California who met the following criteria:

1. California public school district superintendents
2. Located in California
3. Have more than three consecutive years in their current position
4. Superintendents must meet at least two of the following criteria:

   a) Have membership in professional organizations

   b) Have presented on leadership at local or state conference

   c) Have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership.

The requirement of a superintendent being in his or her position for at least three years is based on this being a common benchmark found in the literature on the longevity of superintendents; and according to Finnin, McCord, Stream, Petersen, and Ellerson (2015), “Three year contracts represent the largest percentage of contracts offered to superintendents” (p. 7) so this is often a timeframe to get beyond when referring to the longevity of the superintendent.

Sample

A sample is defined by Krathwohl (2009) as a subset of a larger group representing the whole. The sample is the subgroup of the target population the researcher plans to study. Ideally, the sample of individuals is representative of the entire population (Creswell, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Often when a researcher decides to use a quantitative approach, random sampling is preferred (Patten, 2012). However, purposive, criteria-based sampling was used to identify the sample for the quantitative portion of this study due to access issues with the study population and the need to identify key individuals that meet the criteria for participation. This study also used purposive sampling for the qualitative approach that followed the quantitative piece to further understand and strengthen the data that were collected. According to Patten (2012), purposive sampling is used when the researcher believes individuals are “key
informants in terms of social dynamics, leadership positions, job responsibilities, and so on” (p. 19).

This study requires the collection of data from individuals who have been identified as exceptional and successful superintendents working in California school districts for more than three years in their current position who met at least three of the following criteria: have membership in professional organizations, have presented on leadership at local or state conference, or have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership.

**Quantitative Sampling**

The researcher has limited personal access to the target population identified in this study, and in an effort to increase the sample size and draw from individuals across the state, the researcher worked with her committee to gain access to such individuals. The north/south superintendents group represents more than 50 superintendents who meet the sample selection criteria. Each of the superintendents who are members of these groups have more than three years successful experience as a superintendent and have been recognized by their peers, the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), regional associations, and national associations as exemplary leaders. The researcher has access to this group of superintendents, and it was used as the sample population. The committee members assisted by informing the target population of the study, providing access to the survey instruments, and encouraging participation.

The use of the north/south superintendents group meets the criteria set forth in the purposive design. In addition to the research being purposive, it also used convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is when the population selected for the research is
chosen based on their being easily accessible to the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher had access to superintendents who are members of the north/south superintendents group.

For this research study, both site selection and criterion sampling were used to identify the participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that site selection “in which a site is selected to locate people involved in a particular event, is preferred when the research focus is on complex micro-processes” (p. 326). When selecting sites for research, criteria must first be established for the sites to meet, and the criteria must be aligned to the research problem (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For the quantitative portion of this study, a minimum of 20 superintendents were identified for participation and a minimum of two subordinates were identified for each superintendent.

The following criteria were used when selecting participants for this study:

1. California public school district superintendents
2. Located in California
3. Have more than three consecutive years in their current position
4. Superintendents must meet at least three of the following criteria:
   a) Have membership in professional organizations
   b) Have presented on leadership at local or state conference
   c) Have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership.

Subordinates must have been currently working for the superintendent and had worked for him or her for at least two years to qualify as participants in the study. A subordinate was identified as a person in a leadership or administrative position and reporting directly to the superintendent.
Qualitative Sample

Individuals for the qualitative portion of this study were identified using criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) stated, “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). The criteria for the population of this study were California superintendents who met at least three of the following criteria: have more than three consecutive years in their current position, have membership in professional organizations, have presented on leadership at local or state conferences, or have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership. In addition, purposive selection was used to select interview participants. The researcher worked with her committee to identify interview candidates and to secure their participation.

Instrumentation

This mixed methods study used three instruments to collect the data. Two eight-item surveys were used to collect the quantitative data, one to be used by superintendents and one to be used by superintendents’ subordinates. Interviews conducted by the researcher were used to collect the qualitative data.

Quantitative Instrumentation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested that the instruments used to collect data are “reliable and will provide a range of responses” (p. 226). The 8-Item Grit Scale meets this suggestion (Appendix A). The original instrument that was used to measure grit is referred to as the Grit-O Scale, or the 12-Item Grit Scale, and was comprised of 12 questions that were identified in a two-factor structure based on the two traits that make up grit: stamina based in interest and effort (Duckworth et al., 2007). As its name
suggests, this instrument contains 12 questions that are used to determine an individual’s level of grit. The instrument was validated after six studies were conducted: one on each of the Big Five personality traits which are extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (McCrae & Costa, 1990).

Following the validation of the Grit-O, further research was conducted to better refine the instrument. Duckworth and Quinn (2009) conducted several studies to validate a shorter, more reliable eight-item instrument called the Grit-S, noting as follows:

[It is] a more efficient measure of trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Confirmatory factor analyses supported a two-factor structure of the self-report version of Grit-S in which Consistency of Interest and Perseverance of Effort both loaded on grit as a second-order latent factor. Both factors showed adequate internal consistency and were strongly intercorrelated, \( r = .59, p < .001 \) while reducing the number of questions a participant needs to respond to by four. (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009, p. 173)

After an extensive yet unsuccessful search to find an instrument that could be used for subordinates to report their perceptions of their supervisors’ level of grit, the researched contacted the Duckworth Laboratory directly to see if such an instrument existed. The Duckworth Laboratory responded by saying that currently no such instrument exists, yet the Grit-S could be modified to meet the needs of this research by changing the pronouns in the instrument from “I” to “he/she” (Appendix B). Based on this recommendation, the researcher modified the Grit-S instrument by changing the pronouns so data could be collected from subordinates regarding their perception of their supervisors’ level of grit.
**Qualitative Instrumentation**

When conducting a qualitative research study, the researcher acts as the instrument (Patton, 2002). Of the three techniques to collect qualitative data—interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2002)—the interview approach was used in this study. Interviews for this study were conducted individually either in person or over the phone, with the researcher conducting the interview. Specifically, the interview guide approach was used by which “topics are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the sequence and wording of the questions during the interview” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 355). When using this approach, Patton (2002) stated, the interviewer “remains free to build a conversation . . . but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (p. 343).

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher conducted a field-test of the instrument. Two superintendents or former superintendents who were not a part of the study were administered the interview by the researcher. Following the interviews the participants gave feedback regarding the interview questions and process. Changes were made to the instrument as appropriate following the feedback. In addition, a colleague of the researcher who is familiar with interview protocol observed the researcher administering the interviews. Following the interviews the colleague gave the researcher feedback regarding any behavior that could influence responses or indicate researcher bias.

**Data Collection**

Before data collection began, the researcher obtained approval from the Instructional Review Board at Brandman University to conduct this study (see Appendix
C). Participants’ rights and privacy were protected throughout the duration of the study. Informed consents were provided to and then obtained from all participants before beginning any portion of the data collection (see Appendix D).

**Quantitative Data Collection**

Data pertaining to the quantitative portion of this study (and in an effort to answer Research Questions 1, 2, and 3) were collected by administering the Grit-S Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009) to superintendents and the modified Grit-S Scale to subordinates. Both surveys were given electronically via Survey Monkey. If a participant was unable to access the survey via the Internet, a paper and pencil version was made available. The target population was studied using the Survey Monkey software. All information was protected using a secure, password-protected Survey Monkey account. The purpose of the study and the confidentiality clause were made available in a letter that accompanied the survey. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were required to indicate they had read the letter.

**Qualitative Data Collection**

Once the quantitative data were collected, eight superintendents who completed the Grit-S survey were purposively selected to participate in individual interviews. Interviews were conducted either in person or over the phone. Individual interviews were conducted in order to better understand the components of grit and how it contributes to sustained and effective leadership, answering Research Question 4.

**Data Analysis**

This mixed methods study collected quantitative data from surveys administered to superintendents and to their subordinates. It was then followed by collecting
qualitative data from individual interviews with randomly selected superintendents who had completed the survey. The quantitative data were analyzed first, and then the qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed. A final analysis was conducted to examine the connections between the quantitative and qualitative data, which were then used to interpret and explain the findings of this study.

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

For the quantitative portion of this study, the Grit-S was given to superintendents who met the requirements of the target population. The modified Grit-S was then given to the subordinates of the superintendents who completed the survey. A mean score item analysis of the Grit-S from superintendents was used to answer Research Question 1, determining the average level of grit of superintendants in the target population. A mean score item analysis on the modified Grit-S used to collect data from subordinates was used to answer the Research Question 2, determining the average level of the subordinates’ perception of their superintendent’s level of grit.

To answer Research Question 3 and determine if there is a significant difference in superintendants’ self-reported level of grit and subordinates’ perception of their superintendent’s level of grit, the researcher statistically compared the results from the two groups in each of the eight questions asked on the survey as well as the overall grit score. This was done by conducting a \( t \) test on each corresponding item on the respective Grit tests. \( T \) tests were used to compare the means of two samples, as McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, “There is a comparison between two values to see if they are different” (p. 299). One sample was the data collected from superintendants, and the second sample came from the data collected from subordinates.


**Qualitative Data Analysis**

Once the quantitative data were analyzed, the researcher then reviewed the interview questions to ensure they were still valid and relevant. If, after analysis of the quantitative data was complete, the researcher determined changes needed to be made to the interview questions, it was done at this point.

This study used authentic narratives, which according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) use “thick description in the narrative, interspersed with brief quotations representing participants’ language” (p. 337). Technology-based software such as NVIVO was used to input transcribed interviews that were then coded to look for themes and patterns. Once major themes and patterns were identified, they were then linked back to Research Question 4, which asks what the leadership and personal attributes are that superintendents believe contribute to their grittiness. Upon completion of the qualitative analysis, data from the surveys were compared to data from the interviews.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations that could influence this mixed methods study. First, the explanatory sequential design of this study requires timing of the data collection to be organized in such a way that interviews could be conducted shortly after surveys were collected and analyzed. Since summer is often when school district employees take vacation, it was important to plan the deployment of both surveys accordingly.

Second, superintendents are busy professionals with very little extra time. Interviews needed to be scheduled in advance and organized in such a way that would not require too much of the superintendents’ time in order to avoid interruptions in the
interview process. The use of purposive sample selection limits generalizability to some degree, as the familiarity of the participant with either the researcher or the researcher’s committee could incline the participant favorably toward the study.

Finally, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that when using a mixed methods approach, the researcher needs to have expertise in both quantitative and qualitative research methods. To ensure the proper mixed methods technique was being adhered to, two of the three committee members have extensive expertise in this methodological approach.

**Summary**

A mixed methods approach and an explanatory sequential design were used for this study. As a mixed methods approach, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to add to the research on grit and the superintendency. This chapter began by restating the purpose statement, research questions, and research design followed by an extensive examination of the rationale for the research design, population, sample, data collection instruments, the methods of data collection, and the methods of data analysis. The chapter concluded with a discussion of possible limitations and ethical precautions that were taken to protect human subjects who voluntarily participated in this study.

Chapter IV reports on the research findings and in-depth descriptions of both the quantitative and qualitative results of this study. Chapter V discusses a comprehensive analysis of the data as well as significant findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future study.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This chapter describes the research methodology that was used to conduct this research study, the quantitative data collected from the superintendents using the Grit-S survey, the quantitative data collected from the superintendents’ subordinates using the modified Grit-S survey, the qualitative data collected from interviews with some of the superintendents who completed the Grit-S survey, and the findings from the data. The chapter begins with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, population and sample, and methodology. The chapter then continues with a review and analysis of the data. The data collected from the quantitative surveys address Research Questions 1 through 3 and are presented in narrative form followed by a table format. The data collected from the qualitative interviews address Research Question 4 and report in narrative form the trends superintendents report that contribute to their grittiness and include direct quotes and summaries.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify and describe the level of grit in California superintendents as indicated by the Duckworth Grit Scale. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine how subordinates view their superintendent’s level of grit. It was also the purpose of this study to determine if a significant difference exists between the ratings of superintendents and subordinates on the Duckworth Grit Scale. The final purpose of this study was to discover how superintendents describe the attributes that contribute to their grittiness.
Research Questions

1. What do California superintendents perceive as their level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

2. What do superintendents’ subordinates perceive as the superintendent’s level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

3. Is there a significant difference between self-reported and subordinate-reported perceived levels of grit?

4. What are the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents perceive that contribute to their level of grit?

Methodology

For this mixed methods study the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale, which asks fixed-choice questions, was used to measure the superintendents’ level of grit and produce quantitative data. Next, the researcher, using open-ended questions to produce qualitative data, interviewed a smaller number of superintendents. Triangulation was then used to strengthen the data.

The initial Grit-S survey was sent to over 500 superintendents in California. Of the 500 superintendents who were invited to participate in the research 82 individuals viewed the survey, 48 completed it, and 24 met the requirements of this study as described in Chapter III; and their results are reported here.

The modified Grit-S survey was sent to 48 subordinates whose names and contact information were provided by the superintendents who completed the first survey. Of the 48 subordinates who were invited to participate in the study 28 individuals viewed the
survey, 21 completed it, and 17 met the requirement of the study as described in Chapter III; and their results are reported here.

Eight of 24 superintendents who took part in the survey were contacted for a follow-up interview to describe in more detail the leadership and personal attributes that they believe contribute to their level of grit. A field-test of the interview was first conducted by the researcher with a colleague observing to give feedback to the questions and the interview procedure and techniques. Once the field-test was complete the researcher conducted the actual interviews, asking the following questions:

1. Reflecting back on your professional success, what personal characteristics have contributed to your grittiness?

2. Reflecting back on your professional success, what leadership characteristics have contributed to your grittiness?

3. As a superintendent, can you describe a situation where there have been professional obstacles or setbacks but you were able to overcome them?

4. As someone who rates himself or herself as diligent, what does being diligent look like to you?

5. In spite of the challenges you face as a superintendent, what strategies do you use to keep going?

6. Is there anything else you can think of that has contributed your grittiness as a superintendent?

The data were then transcribed and coded using NVivo to look for themes and patterns that contribute to the superintendents’ level of grit.
Population

Creswell (2008) defined a population as “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). Thus, a population can be any size and come from any particular area. Generally speaking, a researcher would like to gather as much information as possible from the population for a thorough study. However, time and monetary constraints inhibit researchers from using such large samples. In the case of public school districts in the state of California, there are approximately 1,082 public school districts in California (CDE, 2015) and a superintendent governs each school district; thereby, there are approximately 1,000 superintendents in the state of California (see Table 1, reproduced here for convenience).

Table 1

Types and Number of California School Districts: 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District type</th>
<th>Number of districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unified</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While there are approximately 1,000 superintendents in California, a study of 1,000 district superintendents would be an unreasonably sized population for this study and therefore needed to be significantly reduced. According to Creswell (2008), “The target population or ‘sampling frame’ is the actual list of sampling units from which the
sample is selected” (p. 393). The target population for the study was public school
district superintendents in California who met the following criteria:

1. California public school district superintendents
2. Located in California
3. Have more than three consecutive years in their current position
4. Superintendents must meet at least two of the following criteria:
   a) Have membership in professional organizations
   b) Have presented on leadership at local or state conference
   c) Have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership

   The requirement of a superintendent being in his or her position for at least three
years is based on this being a common benchmark found in the literature on the longevity
of superintendents; and according to Finnin et al. (2015), “Three year contracts represent
the largest percentage of contracts offered to superintendents” (p. 7) so this is often a
timeframe to get beyond when referring to the longevity of the superintendent.

Subordinates must have been currently working for the superintendent and had
worked for him or her for at least two years to qualify as participants in the study. A
subordinate was identified as a person in a leadership or administrative position and
reporting directly to the superintendent.

**Sample**

A sample is defined by Krathwohl (2009) as a subset of a larger group
representing the whole. The sample is the subgroup of the target population the
researcher plans to study. Ideally, the sample of individuals is representative of the entire
population (Creswell, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). Often when a researcher decides
to use a quantitative approach, random sampling is preferred (Patten, 2012). However, purposive, criteria-based sampling was used to identify the sample for the quantitative portion of this study due to access issues with the study population and the need to identify key individuals that met the criteria for participation. This study also used purposive sampling for the qualitative approach that followed the quantitative piece to further understand and strengthen the data that were collected. According to Patten (2012), purposive sampling is used when the researcher believes individuals are “key informants in terms of social dynamics, leadership positions, job responsibilities, and so on” (p. 19).

This study required the collection of data from individuals who were identified as exceptional and successful superintendents working in California school districts for more than three years in their current position who met at least three of the following criteria: have membership in professional organizations, have presented on leadership at local or state conference, or have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership. This study also required the collection of data from individuals referred by the participating superintendent as a direct report (also referred to as a subordinate) and who had served in their current position for at least two years.

**Demographic Data**

**Superintendents**

Twenty-four superintendents met the criteria for this study and completed the Grit-S survey, with every participant answering every question. The requirements for participation were superintendents working in California school districts for more than three years in their current position who met at least three of the following criteria: have
membership in professional organizations, have presented on leadership at local or state conference, or have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership. Fifteen out of the 24 participants were male, and nine were female. The average years at which the participants had been in their current position was 6.5 years. The size of their school districts ranged from 384-34,000 students with a mean student population of 12,055.

For the interview portion of the study, eight superintendents were selected for a follow-up interview in order to answer Research Question 4 and determine what leadership and personal attributes contributed to their level of grit. Of the eight superintendents who participated in the interview, six were male and two were female. The average years serving in their current position was 6.9 years, and their districts ranged in size from 384-34,000 students with a mean student population of 10,036.

Subordinates

Each superintendent reported the names and contact information of two subordinates who reported directly to them. Since 24 superintendents completed the survey, 46 subordinates were asked to participate in this study. Of the 48 subordinates, 21 completed the modified Grit-S survey asking to report on their perception of their supervisor’s level of grit. Of the 21 who completed the survey, 17 met the criteria of being in their current position for at least two years (indicating that they had knowledge of their superintendent’s behaviors and could report on each of the grit attributes).
Data by Research Questions

Research Question 1

What do California superintendents perceive as their level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

The Grit-S survey consists of eight questions yielding an overall grit score. The grit scale, and each of the attributes it measures, ranges from 1 to 5, with 5 being extremely gritty and 1 being not gritty at all (Duckworth et al., 2009). In addition to providing the mean score for each of the attributes and the overall grit score, the data displayed here also include the standard deviation of mean score reported. The closer the standard deviation is to zero, the narrower the range of variance in the individual results (Patten, 2012) meaning that the scores reported were closer in range and thus yielded more consistency of individual scores.

Of the eight attributes of grit that the survey measures, superintendents showed the highest level of grit in that they are hard workers (4.75) with a standard deviation of 0.85, followed by the statement that they are diligent (4.67) with a slightly lower standard deviation of 0.56. While the mean score was higher in that they are hard workers, the standard deviation was lower for the statement on diligence, indicating that there was more consistency in that score. The attributes that superintendents identified least with was “new ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones” (3.25) with a standard deviation of 0.90 indicating that they do sometimes get distracted by new ideas and projects; yet with the standard deviation of 0.90 this shows that there was a wider range of scores reported. The second to last attribute that superintendents identified with was “setbacks don’t discourage me” (3.71) indicating that setbacks can discourage
superintendents. While superintendents indicated that setbacks can discourage them, the data show that this attribute also had the largest standard deviation of all the attributes, coming in at 1.30. Given that the standard deviation is 1.30, this shows that there was a high degree of variance in the way superintendents answered this question, yielding the average score of 3.71 for that attribute. While these two statements ranked the lowest of the attributes that contribute to one’s grittiness, it is worth noting that scores were above 2.5 indicating that the participants as a whole still show a moderate level of grit in these areas.

The overall grit score for the superintendents who participated in this research is 4.14 indicating that superintendents have a high level of grit. While the standard deviation among the individual attributes of grit ranged from 0.51 to 1.30, the standard deviation of the overall grit score as reported by superintendents was the lowest standard deviation of only 0.38, which indicates a minimal variance between respondent scores and thus indicating that the overall grit score of superintendents tends to be fairly consistent and superintendents who participated in this study are gritty.

Table 2 shows each of the eight attributes that are used to measure grit and the overall grit score, mean, and standard deviation from the Duckworth Grit-S survey as reported by superintendents. The table also displays the number of participants who responded to each question on the grit survey.

The overall grit score for superintendents who participated in this study is 4.14, indicating that superintendents have a high level of grit. The attributes ranked from highest to lowest in terms of grit are the following:

- I am a hard worker (4.75).
Table 2

*The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Each of the Eight Items on the Grit-S Survey Including the Overall Grit Score as Reported by Superintendents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grit attribute</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage me.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a hard worker.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish whatever I begin.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am diligent.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit score</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I am diligent (4.67).
- I finish whatever I begin (4.54). This attribute had the lowest standard deviation, meaning there was the most agreement between respondents in rating this quality.
- I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete (4.21).
  - Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that they do NOT have difficulty maintaining focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.
- I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one (4.00).
  - Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that they do NOT often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.
• I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest (3.96).
  
  o Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that they have NOT been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest).

• Setbacks don’t discourage me (3.71). This grit quality also had the highest standard deviation (1.30), meaning there was less agreement among respondents in rating this quality.

• New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones (3.25).
  
  o Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that new ideas and projects often do NOT distract them from previous ones.

Each of the attributes on the Grit-S survey as well as the overall grit score range from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating not gritty at all and 5 indicating very gritty. Five of the eight attributes scored at a 4 or above, and three scored 3.25 to 3.99 indicating that there is a moderate to high level of grit for each of the eight attributes. The overall grit score was 4.14 indicating that superintendents as a group have a high level of grit. In addition, the overall grit score had a standard deviation of only 0.38, meaning there was a high level of agreement by all respondents to the overall score.

**Research Question 2**

What do superintendents’ subordinates perceive as the superintendent’s level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

Subordinates were asked to report on their perception of their superintendents’ level of grit using the modified Grit-S survey. The survey was sent to 48 direct reports of
the superintendents who participated in the first grit survey and whose names and contact information were provided by the superintendents. Of the 48 who were contacted, 21 individuals responded and of those 21, 17 met the requirements of participating in the study. The data reported here show the mean scores and standard deviation for each of the eight attributes measured on the Grit-S survey as well as the overall mean grit score and standard deviation as reported by subordinates.

The results show that subordinates rated their superintendents’ overall level of grit at 4.25 with a standard deviation of 0.64 indicating that they perceived their superintendents to be gritty yet with a minimal variance in scores. These results indicate that there was a high degree of agreement among respondents in the overall grit score. The subordinates’ mean is higher than the superintendents’ self-reported level of grit (4.14), which shows that subordinates viewed their superintendents as having a higher level of grit than the superintendents reported they have, yet there is also a slightly higher standard deviation reported by subordinates. The standard deviation from superintendents was only 0.38, while the standard deviation in the subordinate group was 0.64, which indicates there was a slightly higher variance in overall grit scores reported by subordinates.

Subordinates ranked their superintendents as grittiest in the attribute of “he/she is a hard worker” (4.88) with a standard deviation of only 0.33 indicating that there was very little variance in the perception of this attribute. The second highest scoring attribute was diligence. Subordinates ranked their superintendents as being very diligent with a mean score of 4.82 and a standard deviation of only 0.39.
The lowest scoring grit attribute was “new ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her.” The mean score of this attribute came in at 3.53, yet the standard deviation was the highest of all the attributes at 1.23. This shows that while subordinates as a whole indicated their superintendents are least gritty in this area, not all of the participants’ individual scores were close in number.

The second to lowest ranking attribute was that “setbacks don’t discourage him/her” at 4.01 indicating that subordinates perceived that setbacks could discourage their superintendents. However, this had the second largest standard deviation of 1.22 again indicating that not all of the individual scores were close in number. Additionally, it is worth noting that although this was the second to lowest ranking attribute on the survey, it still came in with a score of 4.01 indicating that superintendents were still perceived as gritty in this area.

The overall grit score as perceived by subordinates was 4.25 indicating that subordinates perceive their superintendents as gritty. The standard deviation was 0.64 showing a mild degree of variance. Table 3 shows the mean score and standard deviation of each of the eight attributes that were used to measure grit as well as the overall mean grit score and standard deviation of superintendents as perceived by their subordinates.

Table 3 shows each of the eight attributes that are used to measure grit and the overall grit score, including the mean and standard deviation from the Duckworth Grit-S survey as reported by subordinates on their perception of their superintendents’ level of grit. The table also displays the number of participants who responded to each question on the grit survey.
Table 3

The Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Each of the Eight Items on the Grit-S Survey Including the Overall Grit Score as Reported by Subordinates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grit attribute</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her from previous ones.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage him/her.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she is a hard worker.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a different one.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she has difficulty maintaining his/her focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she finishes whatever he/she begins.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He/she is diligent.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit score</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall grit score for superintendents as reported by their subordinates was 4.25 with a standard deviation of 0.64, indicating that subordinates perceived their superintendents have a high level of grit with a minor degree of variance in scores, meaning there was a high degree of agreement among respondents. The attributes ranked from highest to lowest in terms of mean grit scores are the following:

- He/she is a hard worker (4.88). This attribute also had the lowest standard deviation, meaning there was the most agreement among respondents in rating this quality.
- He/she is diligent (4.82).
- He/she finishes whatever he/she begins (4.41).
• He/she has difficulty maintaining his/her focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete (4.24).
  o Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that they do NOT have difficulty maintaining focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.

• He/she often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a different one (4.06).
  o Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that they do NOT often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.

• He/she has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest (4.01).
  o Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that they have NOT been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.

• Setbacks don’t discourage him/her (4.00).

• New ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her from previous ones (3.53). This grit quality also had the highest standard deviation (1.23), meaning there was less agreement among respondents in rating this quality.
  o Based on the way the survey scores are interpreted, this indicates the inverse in that new ideas and projects often do NOT distract them from previous ones.

Each of the attributes on the Grit-S survey as well as the overall grit score range from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating not gritty at all and 5 indicating very gritty. Seven of the eight attributes scored at a 4 or above, and only one scored below 4 coming in at 3.53 indicating that there is a moderate to high level of grit for each of the eight attributes.
The standard deviation was higher among the subordinates in five of the eight attributes as well as the overall grit score. The overall grit score was 4.25 indicating that subordinates perceived superintendents as having a high level of grit. In addition, the overall grit score had a standard deviation of only 0.64, meaning there was a moderately high level of agreement by all respondents to the overall score.

**Research Question 3**

Is there a significant difference between self-reported and subordinate-reported perceived levels of grit?

Table 4 lists each of the eight attributes found on the Grit-S survey including the overall grit score. Both superintendents and subordinates mean scores and standard deviation are listed for each of the attributes and the overall grit score. Additionally, this table shows the results of a *t* test performed for each of the eight attributes as well as the overall score thereby, indicating if a significant difference exists in any of the eight attributes and the overall grit score.

A *t* test is conducted when a researcher wants to compare two values and then determine if there is a difference in those values. For this study a *t* test was used to compare two samples, one sample from each group. The *t* test calculates the *t* score, degrees of freedom, and *p* value to determine if there is a significant difference (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) and is included in Table 4.

The table shows that subordinates ranked their superintendents as having a higher level of grit than superintendents ranked themselves. Subordinates perceived superintendents level of grit to be at 4.25, while superintendents reported having a mean grit level of 4.14. The data also show that subordinates perceived superintendents to have
Table 4

Comparison of Superintendents (Supts.) and Subordinates (Sub.) Mean Grit Score and Standard Deviation (SD) Including Significant Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Supts.</th>
<th>Sub.</th>
<th>t score</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>-0.80</td>
<td>0.4311 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage me.</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>-0.73</td>
<td>0.4705 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.8563 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a hard worker.</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-0.68</td>
<td>0.5013 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.8061 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>0.9148 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish whatever I begin.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.6598 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am diligent.</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
<td>0.3184 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grit score</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>0.4754 Zero hypothesized difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a higher level of grit than superintendents believed themselves to have on each of the eight attributes except for the attribute that asks if superintendents finish whatever they begin. Superintendents’ mean score for this attribute was 4.54, while subordinates mean score for this attribute was 4.41. However, this is only a difference of 0.13 on a five-point scale, and the scores from both groups indicate that there is a high level of grit concerning that attribute.

Addressing the research question of if a significant difference exists in the superintendents’ self-reported level of grit and the subordinates’ perception of their superintendents’ level of grit, a t test was conducted to determine if a significant difference existed in any of the eight grit attributes as well as the overall grit scores. Results show that a significant difference does not exist between superintendents’ self-reported level of grit and subordinates’ perception of grit in any of the eight attributes or the overall grit score.

A t test was conducted for each of the eight attributes surveyed as well as for the overall grit score. Results indicate that a significant difference does not exist for any of the attributes or the overall score. This means that the way subordinates perceive their superintendents in regard to grittiness is a reliable indicator of how superintendents would rate themselves.

As a whole, subordinates ranked their perception of their superintendents’ level of grit (4.25) higher than superintendents ranked themselves (4.14). Additionally, subordinates ranked their superintendents higher on each of the eight attributes than the superintendents ranked themselves, except for the attribute regarding finishing whatever the superintendents begin. Superintendents had a mean score of 4.54 in that area, while
subordinates reported a mean score slightly lower at 4.41. However, it is worth noting the difference on that attribute was only 0.13 on a five-point scale and both the superintendents’ and the subordinates’ scores were still considered very gritty.

**Ranking of Grit Attributes From Superintendents and Subordinates From Highest Grit Score to Lowest Grit Score**

Table 5 shows in ranking order, from grittiest attribute to least gritty attribute, how both superintendents and subordinates scored on each of the eight attributes from the Grit-S survey. The data show that both superintendents and subordinates had the same ranking order on each of the eight attributes.

**Table 5**

*Ranking of Grit Attributes From Superintendents and Subordinates From Highest Grit Score to Lowest Grit Score*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Superintendents</th>
<th>Subordinates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I am a hard worker (4.74).</td>
<td>He/she is a hard worker (4.88).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am diligent (4.67).</td>
<td>He/she is diligent (4.82).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I finish whatever I begin (4.54).</td>
<td>He/she finish whatever he/she begins (4.41).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete (4.21).</td>
<td>He/she has difficulty maintaining his/her focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete (4.24).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one (4.0).</td>
<td>He/she often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a different one (4.06).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest (3.96).</td>
<td>He/she has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest (4.01).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage me (3.71).</td>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage him/her (4.0).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones (3.25).</td>
<td>New ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her from previous ones (3.53).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When each of the eight attributes that measure grit on the Grit-S survey were ranked from most gritty attribute to least gritty attribute in both superintendents and their subordinates, each attribute from each group was ranked exactly the same. The actual score varied slightly, but when placed in ranking order they were exactly the same.

**Research Question 4**

What are the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents perceive that contribute to their level of grit?

Eight superintendents participated in a follow-up interview to further explore what leadership and personal attributes superintendents perceive contribute to their level of grit. A field-test was first conducted to ensure the questions being asked to participants would accurately address the research question and to ensure the researcher would not have any bias during the interview process and thus influencing the interviewee. The researcher interviewed two individuals both of whom did not participate in the study: one a current superintendent and one former superintendent who is now serving as an assistant superintendent. One of the interviews was conducted in person, and another was conducted over the phone. After each interview the researcher asked for feedback from the participant regarding question choice, sequence, and if he or she perceived any bias from the researcher. Then the researcher debriefed with the observer, seeking feedback in the same areas of question choice, sequence, and bias. Once the field-test was completed the researcher began the formal interviews with the superintendents.

Before the interviews took place a verbal informed consent was received from all of the participants. Once the verbal consent was received the following six questions
were asked to superintendents. The interviews were all recorded, transcribed, and then
coded for major themes and patterns relating to the research question.

1. Reflecting back on your professional success, what personal characteristics have
   contributed to your grittiness?

2. Reflecting back on your professional success, what leadership characteristics have
   contributed to your grittiness?

3. As a superintendent, can you describe a situation where there have been professional
   obstacles or setbacks but you were able to overcome them?

4. As someone who rates himself or herself as diligent, what does being diligent look like
to you?

5. In spite of the challenges you face as a superintendent, what strategies do you use to
   keep going?

6. Is there anything else you can think of that has contributed your grittiness as a
   superintendent?

Table 6 summarizes the major themes that arose as a result of the interview.

   Purposeful perseverance was a theme that came up in every interview and
surfaced often. Perseverance is described as directed effort over time (Pickett et al.,
2000). While there was undoubtedly the theme of perseverance, there was also an
underlying theme linked to it of a conscious, unwavering decision that they were going to
persevere. Even if there was a failure, it did not mean the game was over; as one
superintendent put it, “Failure stands for first attempt in learning.”

   There were a series of short statements that also capture this theme of purposeful
perseverance:
“There’s no choice! I guess it’s keep going.”

“If I say I’m going to do something, [I] get it done.”

“I will do whatever it takes to succeed.”

“Just doing whatever you need in order to accomplish or attain your goal.”

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes of Personal and Leadership Attributes That Have Contributed to Superintendents’ Level of Grit</th>
<th>Summary of theme</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful perseverance</td>
<td>A conscious decision to keep moving forward and not giving up</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others focused</td>
<td>A desire to support others, being a role model, they felt a purpose was to be part of other peoples’ success</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a goal or a vision to work toward</td>
<td>Intentionally working toward a pre-identified target for success</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competitive, having high expectations, willingness to work hard</td>
<td>Seeing a challenge as an opportunity to succeed, expecting the best, accepting that the work will be difficult and being willing to do it</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life experiences in formative years (upbringing)</td>
<td>While growing up expressing situations they had to overcome such as poverty and dysfunctional family life, and/or having parents who had high expectations for them</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having an outlet outside of work</td>
<td>Having balance and support such as a spouse, a network of friends, a hobby, or exercising</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrating small wins</td>
<td>Recognizing small achievements along the way to a goal or vision</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One superintendent captured this theme really well when he stated the following:

I knew it was going to be really hard but I wasn’t really worried at all because I’m like, alright, well a lot of people have already done this so I can too. You know . . . you just don’t give up. You just keep moving forward, keep moving forward, keep moving forward.
The second most common theme was that all of the superintendents reported being focused on more than just themselves. They persevered for the betterment of others and saw their purpose of being a role model and supporting those they served.

Two superintendents used the term, followership, to describe a leadership quality that has contributed to their grittiness. One said, “Remembering what it was like to be a follower so that you’re performing like a leader and taking the needs of your followers into account.”

The following are some quotes superintendents used to describe their desire to support others which has led to their grittiness:

“I value having the impression on people that I was responsible, dependable and someone who followed through.”

“Knowing that the people I work for trust and believe in me. . . . I think that has strengthened my resolve.”

“That vested commitment to their development has got to be there or you give up and you sell out too quickly.”

“I’ve got to get that same joy out of adults developing under my leadership; and if I don’t have that, I probably need to find another place to be employed because it’s not going to keep your engine running every day if you’re getting the joy of seeing your team develop.”

The third most common theme was having a goal or a vision, being focused on the future with clear desired outcomes for which they were aiming. As one superintendent put it, “I think the one thing that has helped me persevere through difficult times is to have a very clear vision of what it is I’m pursuing.” As another said, “It’s
incredibly important to have an aim, a specific aim that we never take our eyes off of.”
Just as important in capturing this idea of goal setting and having a vision contributing to leadership, another superintendent said, “If your organizational aim really is all important and what we focus on all the time, that diligence will get you through. It will get you through a lot of hurdles and obstacles because you’ve got to keep your eyes on the prize.”

The fourth most common theme was about experiences they had growing up. As one superintendent put it, “Is it nature or nurture”? While that answer will not be concretely found in this study, every superintendent reported something from their formative years (precollege) that they felt contributed to their grittiness:

I would say my personal experience has [contributed to her grittiness]. I was little and petite and a good target for bullies. My mom really pushed me to stand up for myself, because I was naturally one who would avoid or placate or accommodate. So she really pushed me and so I learned to push myself and the grittiness comes from facing obstacles and pushing myself to confront them. . . . Grittiness is facing life. It was a wonderful life but it wasn’t the easiest life, and I learned how to overcome obstacles, how to work with people who are difficult.

Another superintendent believes that grit is something a person is born with and then develops over time. He stated the following:

I think some of that is innate from birth and development through the years. Learning that no obstacle is too big to conquer and having that expectation placed on me by my parents all the way up to owning it myself and becoming that person. Having nothing given to me but the basics. I pretty much worked my
butt off all the way through to where I am today, and I think that certainly plays out in your day to interactions and duties and responsibilities as superintendent.

Another superintendent attributed his grittiness to his background in athletics. He reported being a division one scholarship athlete “who always wanted to be that top person and I think that has led to my current career path.”

There are multiple more stories that superintendents used to tell the story of where their grittiness came from. While there was not a consciousness of whether grit is something they were born with, a byproduct of their environment, or both, the experiences they faced growing up no doubt contributed to their grit as superintendents.

Being competitive and having high expectations came up often and was the fifth most common theme in the interviews. The concept of expecting the best from themselves, their staff, and their students was woven through several of the interviews. Responses ranged from straightforward statements such as, “I am success oriented and I do like a challenge” and “It’s difficult for me to say something can’t be done” and “I’m always pushing myself to be the best” to more detailed answers like the following:

Our district did very well in ELA, not so well in math. And even lower than the county average and the state average so while we’re celebrating the ELA success, I’m energized by the math data. Just excited by the prospect of attacking that and having a plan and being able to, a year from now, reflect on growth that has taken place over the last year. So I think it’s, I guess it’s perspective also in seeing challenges not as insurmountable or something negative but seeing them as opportunities to again climb one more hill and go over it.
Superintendents also made statements such as, “Knowing the challenges, I’m thinking of achievement gaps, knowing that problem doesn’t go away easily . . . that keeps me going throughout this whole process and will continue until I’m no longer doing this work.” These statements and many more like them indicate that superintendents are energized by challenges, and having a challenge to tackle adds to their grittiness.

The superintendents recognized that they had to work hard to tackle these challenges. They acknowledged that there had to be a willingness to do the hard work that is required to lead an organization: “If you really believe something, you stick with it and work hard to accomplish it.”

When asked the question, “What strategies do you use to keep going?” there was a theme of balance that kept surfacing. Superintendents spoke several times of their supportive spouse, having a network of friends, their personal faith, and the importance of some type of hobby. One superintendent said, “Try to find that balance and understand you need to turn the work light off”; while another said, “When I get a setback I try to find a balance in life again and remind myself that family is here to help me physically and mentally.”

Regarding faith they said, “Spiritual development in my own life has been huge” and “I have to have faith first. There’s no way you can do this job without having faith.” When it comes to having a supportive spouse one man said, “Knowing that she understands that I have to make tough decisions . . . that has encouraged me.”

The last major theme that came up was the idea around acknowledging and sometimes celebrating small wins. In order to keep going, to keep working toward that
goal, they had to appreciate the little milestones along the way; seeing these successes and that their hard work was paying off kept them moving toward their goal: “When you’re successful at it, it does motivate you.”

One superintendent said,

Seeing the changes in teachers’ attitudes too was a big help allowing me to continue, because I knew we were doing something right. Hearing positive remarks from parents, students, teachers, administrators, and board members that allowed me to continue this hard work.

Another superintendent spoke more generally and said, “When I look at that [goals and vision] and I can see progress along the way, that is something that helps me drive and continue to work hard and be committed and stay focused on that vision.”

In summary, the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents reported as contributing to their grittiness were purposeful perseverance, others focused, having a goal or vision to work toward, life experiences in formative years, being competitive and having high expectations, a willingness to work hard, having an outlet outside of work to maintain balance, having a supportive network of colleagues, and acknowledging and celebrating small wins.

Summary

This chapter focused on the data and the findings regarding the four research questions used to guide this study. In summary, superintendents were found to be gritty, and for each attribute that measured grit they scored fairly high. There was also minimal standard deviation in the overall grit scores indicating there was little variance in their individual scores.
Subordinates also rated their superintendents as gritty. Subordinates actually rated their superintendents higher on the grit scale than superintendents rated themselves. Regarding the individual grit attributes, subordinates also rated their superintendents as exhibiting a high level of grit and scored their superintendents higher on seven of the eight attributes than superintendents scored themselves. Subordinates, however, did show a higher level of standard deviation than the superintendents on most of the grit attributes and the overall grit score. Additionally, when the attributes of grit were ranked from most gritty to least gritty, superintendents and subordinates ranked the attributes in the exact same order.

A $t$ test was performed for each of the eight attributes and the overall grit score, and it was found that a significant difference did not exist for any of the attributes or the overall grit score. This means that the subordinates’ perception of the superintendents’ individual grit attributes and overall level of grit was related closely enough statistically to say with confidence that subordinates could accurately report on their superintendents’ level of grit.

The final part of this chapter examined what leadership and personal attributes contributed to the superintendents’ level of grit. Through eight interviews that consisted of six open-ended questions, the researcher discovered the following themes (in order from most frequent to least frequent) that superintendents perceived contribute to their grittiness: purposeful perseverance, others focused, having a goal or vision to work toward, life experiences in formative years, being competitive and having high expectations, a willingness to work hard, having an outlet outside of work to maintain
balance, having a supportive network of colleagues, and acknowledging and celebrating small wins.

The following chapter, Chapter V, discusses these findings in more detail. The chapter also explores unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research. The chapter then wraps up the research with concluding remarks and reflections.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V begins with an overview of the research study, stating the purpose statement, research questions, methods, population, and sample. The chapter then describes the major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions from the findings, implication for action, recommendations for further research, and concluding remarks and reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to identify and describe the level of grit in California superintendents as indicated by the Duckworth Grit Scale. In addition, it was the purpose of this study to determine how subordinates view their superintendent’s level of grit. It was also the purpose of this study to determine if a significant difference exists between the ratings of superintendents and subordinates on the Duckworth Grit Scale. The final purpose of this study was to discover how superintendents describe the attributes that contribute to their grittiness.

Research Questions

1. What do California superintendents perceive as their level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

2. What do superintendents’ subordinates perceive as the superintendent’s level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

3. Is there a significant difference between self-reported and subordinate-reported perceived levels of grit?

4. What are the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents perceive that contribute to their level of grit?
Methods

For this mixed methods study the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale, which asks fixed-choice questions, was used to measure the superintendents’ level of grit and produce quantitative data. Next, the researcher, using open-ended questions to produce qualitative data, interviewed a smaller number of superintendents. Triangulation was then used to strengthen the data.

The initial Grit-S survey was sent to over 500 superintendents in California. Of the 500 superintendents who were invited to participate in the research, 82 individuals viewed the survey, 48 completed it, and 24 met the requirements of this study as described in Chapter III; and their results are reported here.

The modified Grit-S survey was sent to 48 subordinates whose names and contact information were provided by the superintendents who completed the first survey. Of the 48 subordinates who were invited to participate in the study, 28 individuals viewed the survey, 21 completed it, and 17 met the requirement of the study as described in Chapter III; and their results are reported here.

Eight of 24 superintendents who took part in the survey were contacted for a follow-up interview to describe in more detail the leadership and personal attributes that they believe contribute to their level of grit. A field-test of the interview was first conducted by the researcher with a colleague observing to give feedback to the questions and the interview procedure and techniques. Once the field-test was complete, the researcher conducted the actual interviews.
Population

Creswell (2008) defined a population as “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics” (p. 644). Thus, a population can be any size and come from any particular area. Generally speaking, a researcher would like to gather as much information as possible from the population for a thorough study. However, time and monetary constraints inhibit researchers from using such large samples. In the case of public school districts in the state of California, there are approximately 1,082 public school districts in California (CDE, 2015) and a superintendent governs each school district; thereby, there are approximately 1,000 superintendents in the state of California. Table 1, reproduced here for convenience, shows the number of districts by type in California.

Table 1

Types and Number of California School Districts: 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District type</th>
<th>Number of districts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unified</td>
<td>341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,028</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


While there are approximately 1,000 superintendents in California, a study of 1,000 district superintendents would be an unreasonably sized population for this study and therefore needed to be significantly reduced. According to Creswell (2008), “The target
population or ‘sampling frame’ is the actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected” (p. 393). The target population for the study was public school district superintendents in California who met the following criteria:

1. California public school district superintendents
2. Located in California
3. Have more than three consecutive years in their current position
4. Superintendents must meet at least two of the following criteria:
   a) Have membership in professional organizations
   b) Have presented on leadership at local or state conference
   c) Have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership.

The requirement of a superintendent being in their position for at least three years is based on this being a common benchmark found in the literature on the longevity of superintendents; and according to Finnin et al. (2015), “Three year contracts represent the largest percentage of contracts offered to superintendents” (p. 7) so this is often a timeframe to get beyond when referring to the longevity of the superintendent.

Subordinates must have been currently working for the superintendent and had worked for him or her for at least two years to qualify as participants in the study. A subordinate was identified as a person in a leadership or administrative position and reporting directly to the superintendent.

**Sample**

This study required the collection of data from individuals who have been identified as exceptional and successful superintendents working in California school districts for more than three years in their current position who met at least three of the
following criteria: have membership in professional organizations, have presented on leadership at local or state conference, or have been recognized by professional organization or peers for their leadership. This study aimed to collect data from at least 20 individuals who met the sample population criteria. Twenty-four individuals took part in the superintendent survey, and eight superintendents participated in the follow-up interview.

This study also required the collection of data from individuals referred by the participating superintendent as a direct report (also referred to as a subordinate) and who had served in their current position for at least two years. Forty-eight individuals were identified as subordinates, and a request for participation was sent to each individual. Twenty-one individuals responded to the invitation to participate; and of the 21 individuals, 17 met the selection criteria of working for the superintendent for at least two years in their current position.

Major Findings

There were several major findings that resulted from this study. This section organizes the major findings by research question.

Research Question 1

What do California superintendents perceive as their level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

The superintendents studied in this research study were found to be gritty. The mean grit score was 4.14 on a five-point scale. The standard deviation for the overall grit score was only 0.38 indicating there was a high level of agreement by all respondents to the overall score.
The instrument used to collect responses, the Grit-S survey, measured eight attributes that contribute to one’s grittiness. The Grit-S survey measures grit with 1 being not gritty and 5 being extremely gritty (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Of the eight attributes, five had a mean score of 4.0 or above, indicating a high level of grit: I am a hard worker (4.75 with a SD of 0.85); I am diligent (4.67 with a SD of 0.56); I finish whatever I begin (4.54 with a SD of 0.51); I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete (4.21 with a SD of 0.59; this was an inverse scoring item, meaning that they do not have difficulty maintaining focus); and I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one (4.0 with a SD of 0.66; this was an inverse scoring item, meaning that they stay focused on their goals).

The remaining three attributes had mean scores between 3.25 and 3.96 indicating a moderately high level of grit: I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest (3.96 with a SD of 0.81; this was an inverse scoring item meaning that they tend not to lose interest); setbacks don’t discourage me (3.71 with a SD of 1.30); and new ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones (3.25 with a SD of 0.90; this was an inverse scoring item meaning that new ideas and projects tend not to distract them from previous ones).

All of the attributes and including the overall grit score had a SD of less than 1.0 except for the attribute, “Setbacks don’t discourage me,” which had a SD of 1.30. This meant there was less agreement among respondents on this particular question. The overall grit score had the lowest SD of only 0.38 indicating that there was a high level of agreement between respondents on their overall level of grit.
Research Question 2

What do superintendents’ subordinates perceive as the superintendent’s level of grit as indicated on the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale?

The subordinates who participated in this research study perceived their superintendents to be gritty. The mean grit score was 4.25 on a five-point scale. The standard deviation for the overall grit score was only 0.64 indicating there was a high level of agreement by all respondents to the overall score. This score of the subordinates’ perception of their superintendents’ level of grit (4.25) was slightly higher than how the superintendents rated themselves (4.14). The standard deviation from the subordinate group (0.64) was also slightly higher than the superintendent group (0.38) meaning that there was more agreement in the superintendent group on the level of grit than with the subordinate group.

The instrument used to collect responses, the Grit-S survey, was modified slightly from the original Grit-S survey, replacing the pronoun “I” with “he/she” in order the collect perception data from the subordinates. The instrument measured the same eight attributes that contributed to grittiness. The modified Grit-S survey measures grit with 1 being not gritty and 5 being extremely gritty (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Of the eight attributes, seven had a mean score of 4.0 or above indicating a high level of grit; and they were: He/she is a hard worker (4.88 with a SD of 0.33); he/she is diligent (4.82 with a SD of 0.39); he/she finishes whatever he/she begins (4.41 with a SD of 1.12); he/she has difficulty maintaining his/her focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete (4.24 with a SD 1.03; this was an inverse scoring item meaning that they do not have difficulty maintaining focus); he/she often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a
different one (4.06 with a SD of 0.83; this was an inverse scoring item meaning that they stay focused on their goals); he/she has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest (4.01 with a SD of 0.90); this was an inverse scoring item meaning that they do not lose interest easily); and setbacks don’t discourage him/her (4.0 with a SD of 1.22).

The only attribute that had a mean score below 4.0 was “new ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her from previous ones,” which had a mean score of 3.53. However, the standard deviation on this attribute was 1.23, meaning that there was less agreement among respondents on this attribute.

Of the eight items measured on the Grit-S survey, four showed a standard deviation ranging from 1.03 to 1.23 (he/she has difficulty maintaining his/her focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete, [1.03]; he/she finishes whatever he/she begins [1.12]; setbacks don’t discourage him/her [1.22]; and new ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her from previous ones [1.23] meaning there was some disagreement among respondents on how they answered the question. However, three of these four items had a mean score of 4.0 to 4.41 (he/she is a hard worker, [0.33]; he/she is diligent [0.39]; he/she often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a different one [0.83]; and he/she has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest [0.90]) thus still showing a high degree of grit, and one item had a mean score of 3.53, still showing a moderately high level of grit. The remaining four items had a standard deviation ranging from 0.33 to 0.90 indicating there was a higher level of agreement among respondents on those questions.
Subordinates tended to rate their superintendents higher than superintendents rated themselves on the eight attributes as well as the overall grit score. Subordinates also showed a higher level of standard deviation on five of the eight attributes as well as the overall grit score.

**Research Question 3**

Is there a significant difference between self-reported and subordinate-reported perceived levels of grit?

A t test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the self-reported and subordinate-reported attributes found on the Grit-S survey and the overall grit score. Results from the t test showed that there was zero hypothesized difference in any of the attributes or the overall grit score. This means that the subordinates’ perception of their superintendents’ level of grit on each of the attributes as well as their overall level of grit is statistically accurate.

**Research Question 4**

What are the leadership and personal attributes that superintendents perceive that contribute to their level of grit?

Interviews were conducted with eight of the superintendents who completed the first Grit-S survey. Upon verbal consent, the researcher asked the participants six open-ended questions that would help to answer the research questions. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded to look for major themes and patterns.

The major themes and patterns relating to leadership and personal attributes that superintendents reported as contributing to their grittiness (from most common theme to least common theme) were purposeful perseverance, others focused, having a goal or
vision to work toward, life experiences in formative years, being competitive and having high expectations, a willingness to work hard, having an outlet outside of work to maintain balance, having a supportive network of colleagues, and acknowledging and celebrating small wins.

**Unexpected Findings**

There were two unexpected findings that came about from this research. They were the ranking order of the grit attributes of superintendents and from the interviews; and most of the superintendents spoke about something from their formative years that they felt contributed to their grittiness.

The eight attributes measured by the Grit-S survey were ranked based on the mean score of each attribute. Interestingly, both the superintendents and the subordinates had the exact same ranking order of the attributes. From most gritty to least gritty they were as follows:

1. I am a hard worker.
2. I am diligent.
3. I finish whatever I begin.
4. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.
5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.
6. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.
7. Setbacks don’t discourage me.
8. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.
The second thing that really surprised the researcher came from conducting the interviews. Several of the superintendents spoke about their formative years and how that contributed to their grittiness as superintendents. Shanahan and Hofer (2005) suggested that genetic traits can be either turned on or suppressed based on the environment in which one is raised. For this study the formative years are defined as ages 1 through 17, since the experiences the superintendents spoke of mainly were prior to going to college. Rank and Hirschl (1999) also used ages 1 through 17 to define the formative years. Several superintendents mentioned their parents had set high expectations for them growing up; others mentioned having difficult situations to overcome. One woman mentioned that she grew up during the women’s rights movement, which encouraged her to pursue college and career goals. While the quantitative instrument measured qualities related to grit, it did not address what contributed to those qualities. As one superintendent mentioned in an interview, “How much of grit is nature and how much is nurture?”

Conclusions

This study examined the level of grit in successful California superintendents. Results from the study show that successful superintendents have a high level of grit based on their overall grit score and the low standard deviation of the overall score. The low standard deviation indicates there was a high level of consistency among the individual scores. This study on grit and successful superintendents produced five main conclusions. The conclusions reached are also supported by the literature and are as follows:
1. During times of turbulence such as board conflict, financial difficulties, union issues, human resources conflicts, instructional accountability, and the many other issues superintendents are faced with, they need to be able to persevere and have strong leadership (Bennett et al., 2014; Tripses et al., 2013). Superintendents, due to their high level of grit and the qualities mentioned during their interviews of liking a challenge, a willingness to work hard, and purposeful perseverance, are very likely to commit to overcoming the obstacle in front of them. In addition to being willing to stick it out and overcome the challenge, superintendents will not just try to survive the obstacle but will rise to the challenge and expect to come out better and stronger than when the situation began. Therefore, gritty superintendents can be expected to do the hard work necessary to overcome challenges they face; and not only can they be expected to overcome them, it is likely that they will produce high-quality outcomes due to the fact that they are energized by challenges and see them as opportunities for growth.

2. The second most common theme from the interviews was that successful superintendents are others focused. They desire to be role models and support others in achieving. Kouzes and Posner (2007) support this finding in that one of the practices of high-performing leaders is modeling. The position of superintendent is a very public one, representing the entire district. Hentze (2010) and Jehlen (2012) stated that superintendents are the CEOs of the organization and therefore the ultimate supervisors; and since gritty superintendents want to look good in the eyes of others and take a genuine interest in helping others, school boards can be more confident that
gritty superintendents will do their best and work hard to make the school district look good to the community (Whitmer, 2014).

3. Prior to this study there was not an instrument that had been used to measure perceptions of another person’s level of grit. This study showed that subordinates’ perceptions of their superintendents’ level of grit were in alignment with how superintendents reported their own grittiness. Given this new information, grit is a character trait that can be accurately measured and reported by others who know the individual well.

4. In addition to subordinates being able to report with confidence on their superintendents’ level of grit, subordinates in this study all showed that they perceived their superintendents as being gritty, indicating that when times do get difficult subordinates will have confidence in their superintendent to work hard and persevere in order to overcome the obstacles in front of them. Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) confirmed this in that the standards of the organization are set by the leader.

5. Grit appears to be a character trait that is strengthened during formative years. While it is unclear if a person is born with grit, there is no doubt that the superintendents studied here attributed their grit to situations they faced growing up, ranging from living in a dysfunctional family environment to having parents who had high expectations and supported their children in reaching for excellence. This trait of grit that was developed as superintendents were growing up allowed them to face obstacles head on and not back away from a challenge (but rather embrace it) and to strive to be the best at what they do. Shanahan and Hofer (2005) noted the
environment in which a person is raised can be a trigger or can suppress inborn predispositions that can possibly be linked to genes.

**Implications for Action**

Based on the first four conclusions and given that it is now known that grittiness is a quality found in successful superintendents, it is recommended that school boards or superintendent search firms examine a candidate’s level of grit or include an examination of their level of grit though an investigative search process. The superintendent could be administered the Grit-S survey, and then current subordinates could be asked to complete the modified Grit-S survey that was used in this study. The research here confirms that the perceptions of subordinates who have worked for a superintendent for at least two years in their current position can accurately report on their superintendents’ level of grit. The results from the surveys can be used to determine the superintendents’ level of grit and can be confirmed further by the survey results from subordinates.

The second implication for action is based on Conclusion 2, that superintendents are others focused. Because grit appears to be due in part to the fact the superintendents desire to support others and be a role model, it is suggested that a superintendent mentorship program that focuses on grit be developed and implemented. Superintendent mentorship programs are not anything new, however, there has yet to be a mentorship program focused of building grit. Gritty and successful superintendents can be paired with either new superintendents or superintendents who have an overall grit score of 3.5 or below. The pair could then establish a mentorship relationship with a primary focus on developing grit. Grit is a trait linked to successful superintendents so therefore there is a need to ensure all superintendents are gritty.
The third implication for action is based on Conclusion 5. Superintendents attributed goal setting, having a vision, willingness to work hard, seeing challenges as opportunities, focusing on the success of others and being an example, and acknowledging and celebrating small wins to their high level of grit. Yet superintendents all stated that grit was due to experiences in their formative years that led to purposeful perseverance. To further strengthen and support leadership development, it is recommended that leadership training be developed and taught in leadership courses or professional development sessions to ensure current and future leaders are given another powerful tool for success.

The professional development training would begin with participants taking the grit survey to determine their level of grit. This survey would be given before an introduction to the character trait of grit so the participants would have less bias than if they took the assessment after an introduction. Once the participants discovered their level of grit, an overview of grit would be presented including research that supports how high levels of grit are associated with success and the attributes linked to grit found from this research.

After a comprehensive overview of grit and the traits associated with it, participants would then engage in creating their GRIT Action Plan. The GRIT Action Plan is a tool that is used to increase the level of grit by creating purposeful perseverance, which was the quality most spoken to during the interviews with superintendents. GRIT stands for the following:

Goals: What do you want to accomplish? What is your vision for your future?
Re-think: What are some challenges that might come up? Flip these into opportunities.
Inspire: Whom can you inspire? How will you be a role model? In what ways can you give back to others? Make this bigger than you.

Triumphs: Acknowledge and celebrate small wins along the way. What are some milestones you anticipate? How will you celebrate? Who will you celebrate with?

The participants would be guided through each step in the GRIT Action Plan, creating a tool for purposeful perseverance. For goals, participants would first be asked to identify something they want to accomplish—their goal. It could be a 1-year goal or a 3- to 5-year goal, but the idea is to keep it within the near future. Once they identified the goal, they would be asked to write out what their lives would look like once that goal is attained—this is creating their vision. Once a general goal was established and a vision created, participants would then be guided through a process to make their goal a SMART goal (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound).

The next part of the GRIT action plan is re-think. This part of the plan allows for a mind shift to see challenges as positive opportunities for overcoming obstacles or setbacks that might arise. Many of the superintendents in this study were energized by challenges, knowing that they were opportunities for growth. Here the participants would be asked to identify three to five challenges that might arise which could prevent them from attaining their goal. Once the challenges were identified, they would then be asked to generate solutions to how they would overcome those challenges. Then the participants would visualize themselves working through the challenge and then writing down how they felt once they have overcame it and were one step closer to attaining their goal. The final step in the re-think process would be to have participants rewrite their
challenge as an opportunity. The re-think process gives participants the coaching to flip a challenge to an opportunity and to see it as a fun hill to climb on the way to the summit.

The “I” in the GRIT Action Plan is for inspire. Next to having purposeful perseverance (which is what the GRIT Action Plan creates), being others focused came in at number two when the interviews were coded for qualities contributing to grittiness. Every superintendent mentioned something about either being a role model or supporting others as a reason for him or her to work hard and accomplish his or her goals. Since this quality contributes perseverance and passion for attaining goals, participants would be asked to identify a person or group of people who know what they are doing (either professionally or personally) and how attaining their goal would inspire others to reach their goals. They could also be given the option of creating tangible ways they could support others either directly or indirectly by working toward and attaining their goal. If participants were struggling with this or as an extension to this part of the GRIT Action Plan, participants could be asked to identify someone who would hold them accountable to reaching their goals—someone who would check in with them regularly to make sure they were still on the path to success. The point here is to get some of the focus off the individual and make it bigger than himself or herself to make them others focused.

The final portion of the GRIT Action Plan is triumph! This is where participants would be asked to identify ways they could acknowledge and celebrate small wins along the way. While the final goal should also come with some type of celebration, there also needs to be milestones of success along the way. This encourages individuals to keep going because they are able to see the progress they are making toward their goal. A major part of this section is getting participants to break down their goal into bite-size
pieces and see the progress they are making. Participants would be asked to create a timeline toward their goal with milestones along the way and at each milestone what they would do to acknowledge and celebrate.

The GRIT Action Plan is designed to help individuals increase their level of grit by establishing purposeful perseverance in an easy-to-follow action plan. The GRIT Action Plan is a strategic roadmap to success that teaches individuals how to apply the qualities of grit that superintendents attribute to their grittiness and their success.

In addition to a leadership curriculum, the researcher recommends that the personal and leadership qualities that contribute to a high level of grit be taught as part of an educational curriculum to students by using the same GRIT Action Plan, which can be used to create a culture of grit. All of the superintendents interviewed spoke specifically about experiences they had growing up which they thought contributed to their grittiness and their success. Most of the superintendents spoke about having to overcome something difficult or having to work really hard to get to where they wanted to be, which would make teaching grit strategies particularly beneficial to students who are at risk or have been identified as having to overcome a difficult situation.

The superintendents reported that their formative years helped build the grit they now have. These skills should be taught and reinforced regularly in an educational setting, ensuring all students have the opportunity to build their own grit so they can learn to persevere and overcome obstacles in order to reach their goals.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the study, the following recommendations are made to further expand the research on grit and the superintendency. The first recommendation would be to
replicate the study with superintendents who have been in their position for less than three years and have never been in a superintendency position for longer than three years. Current research says that only 42% of superintendents are in their position for more than three years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). It is suggested that this study be replicated in order to determine the level of grit in this particular population of superintendents as well as what leadership and personal attributes they perceive contribute to their level of grit in order to further explore the role grit plays in the success of superintendents.

The second recommendation would be to conduct a study to see if a correlation exists between grit and other proven leadership qualities such as emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence has long been attributed to professional and personal success, so it would be interesting exploring the possibility of a correlation between emotional intelligence and grit, which was shown to be a trait of successful superintendents in this study.

The third recommendation for further research based on the findings from this study would be to conduct a longitudinal study beginning with new administrators who express interest in becoming a superintendent. The study would measure their level of grit and follow them along their career path with a focus on the time it takes for administrators to become superintendent and the time they spend in the role of superintendent. This would help further explore and understand the character trait of grit and the role it plays in attaining one’s career goals in education.

The fourth recommendation for further research would be to continue to identify the elements that contribute to one’s grittiness. It has been well established that grit is a factor that contributes to success (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn 2009;
Gladwell, 2008), and this study has further confirmed that it is a character trait for successful superintendents. Since having grit can lead to success, it would be beneficial for people to have a firm understanding of what contributes to grit and if can it be taught. It is suggested to continue to interview successful people other than superintendents who have high levels of grit and explore what makes them gritty. The findings of that study could be compared with the findings of this study to further establish qualities that can be taught in order to increase one’s level of grit.

The fifth recommendation for further research would be to take the strategies identified in this study that have contributed to superintendents’ grittiness and teach them to a group for a fixed period of time. Ideally the group would be students, as superintendents spoke about grit being established in their formative years. The study would measure their level of grit before they begin being taught about grit and the strategies to increase it, and then they would be administered the survey once they completed the educational program to see if their level of grit had increased.

The sixth recommendation for research would be to take the same population of superintendents who participated in this study and focus specifically on trying to identify what specific things from their formative years contributed to their grittiness. Some areas to focus on would be if there was a significant person in their lives who set high standards. Were they supported by an adult to overcome obstacles to set and reach goals? Was there a significant event in their formative years that caused them to persevere? Is grit due to nature, nurture, or both? These are just some questions that should be explored to further understand how grit is formed and increased while a person is growing up, which has direct impact on his or her success later in life.
The seventh recommendation based on findings from this study would be to explore whether there are different types of grittiness. This study looked only at grit as it relates to career success, but could there be different types of grit? For example, when looking at emotional intelligence, a person might have a high level of self-awareness but a low level of social awareness. To explore if there are different types of grit, a grit instrument could be designed (or modified from the Grit-S survey used in this study) to do a whole-person inventory of grittiness looking at the level of grit a person has when it comes to personal accomplishments, career accomplishments, and external (nonfamilial) relationships. This would give people a better understanding of whether there are different types of grit, what they are, and how they contribute to success and human behavior.

The eighth recommendation would be to examine the level of grit in females and see if there is a difference in the level of grit between females and their male counterparts. In public education there are more women teachers than there are men teachers and in the profession as a whole there are more women than men. However, as people progress up the ranks in education there is a shift in female dominance to male dominance. This study, while it was open to both men and women, more men participated than women which reflects the gender demographic makeup of the population. It is therefore recommended that a study be conducted to measure the level of grit in both men and women superintendents to determine if it takes more grit for women to achieve and maintain the highest level of leadership in education.

The ninth recommendation would be to conduct a case study of the story of grit throughout the advancement of superintendents. The case study would examine key
events in the life of superintendents to determine if there were moments where a superintendent was faced with a difficult situation and chose to persevere. All of the superintendents in this study spoke of specific events in their lives that contributed to their grittiness as a superintendent. A case study would look closer at these events in order to further explore the character trait of grit.

The tenth recommendation would be to replicate this study with principals. Principals are charged with the task of leading a school just as superintendents are charged with the task of leading a district. It is recommended that a study be conducted to see if a correlation exists between the level of grit in superintendents and the level of grit in principals. The study would add to the research on the character trait of grit and successful leadership.

The eleventh recommendation would be to examine the level of grit in incoming doctoral students and then follow those students through their doctoral program up to the completion of their oral defense in order to determine if grit is a trait that can be linked to the completion of a doctoral program. Doctoral programs are very intense and require individuals to persevere for long periods of time while continually being faced with difficult tasks. It is recommend to have incoming doctoral students take the Grit-S survey to determine their level of grit as they enter the program and then to obtain their incoming grit score at the time of their oral defense to determine if gritty students are more likely to complete a doctoral program, and, if they are more likely to complete it quicker than their less gritty peers. If it is determined that a correlation exists between a gritty individual and the completion a doctoral program, structures could be put in place that would help develop grit in doctoral students to ensure they obtain their degree.
Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Superintendents are the highest ranking individuals in school districts, and they face an incredibly difficult job with many challenges. Grit is an attribute that every superintendent surveyed was not only able to self-identify but also was perceived by his or her subordinates. It is therefore essential that those who desire to obtain and keep the position of superintendent are gritty.

Grit is a topic that deserves to be researched further and taught to children in their formative years as well as to adults. It is a character trait that has been linked to success, and the qualities that contribute to grittiness (such as goal setting, having a vision, choosing to persevere and work hard, acknowledging and celebrating success along the way) can be taught and learned.

There also needs to be a mind shift as to how people view obstacles and setbacks. Oftentimes we as individuals tend to view obstacles and setbacks as negative things in our lives or even the challenges encountered growing up as negative experiences. Yet from this research we discover those very things that caused us to dig down deep and push through, rather than to simply give up, are the very events in our lives that launch us to greatness. The superintendents in this study are all very successful individuals, but each and every one of them spoke to having to overcome something difficult while growing up or having to work hard to be successful. While in the middle of difficult times it is just that—difficult; it should be acknowledged that it is through purposefully deciding to fight through it that grit is developed, and that level of grit is sustained and used to become great later in life.
Reflecting back on this process of reviewing the literature and conducting my own research, I have found it to be extremely validating to discover the very things we are forced to fight through are the things that make us not only strive for excellence but also to attain it. In addition, I have a greater sense of hope for students who are faced with adversity, knowing that if we in leadership provide them with the tools to develop their own grittiness, they can go on to do great things. While adversity is not easy, it does bring about change; and we are given the opportunity to make that change, the change within others and ourselves, a light in the world.
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Appendix A: Short Grit Scale—Survey for Superintendents

Directions for taking the Grit Scale: Here are a number of statements that may or may not apply to you. For the most accurate score, when responding, think of how you compare to most people—not just the people you know well, but most people in the world. There are no right or wrong answers, so just answer honestly!

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

2. Setbacks don’t discourage me.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

4. I am a hard worker.
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one
   - Very much like me
   - Mostly like me
   - Somewhat like me
   - Not much like me
   - Not like me at all

6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete
7. I finish whatever I begin.

Very much like me
Mostly like me
Somewhat like me
Not much like me
Not like me at all

8. I am diligent.

Very much like me
Mostly like me
Somewhat like me
Not much like me
Not like me at all

Grit Scale Citation


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Appendix B: Short Grit Scale—Survey for Subordinates

Directions for taking the Grit Scale: Here are a number of statements that may or may not apply to your superintendent. For the most accurate score, when responding, think of how he or she compares to most people -- not just the people you know well, but most people in the world. There are no right or wrong answers, so just answer honestly!

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract him/her from previous ones.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

2. Setbacks don’t discourage him/her.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

3. He/she has been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

4. He/she is a hard worker.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

5. He/she often sets a goal but later chooses to pursue a different one.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

6. He/she has difficulty maintaining his/her focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.
   Very much like him/her
Mostly like him/her
Somewhat like him/her
Not much like him/her
Not like him/her at all

7. He/she finishes whatever he/she begins.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

8. He/she is diligent.
   Very much like him/her
   Mostly like him/her
   Somewhat like him/her
   Not much like him/her
   Not like him/her at all

Grit Scale Citation

This survey has changed the pronoun “I” to “He/She” with permission from the Duckworth Laboratory.


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Appendix C: Brandman University Institutional Review Board Approval

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB Application Action – Approval

Date: June 21, 2015

Name of Investigator/Researcher: Jacqueline Keams

Faculty or Student ID Number: B00181608

Title of Research Project: The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

Project Type: ☑ New  ☐ Continuation  ☐ Resubmission

Category that applies to your research:
☑ Doctoral Dissertation EdD
☐ DNP Clinical Project
☐ Masters’ Thesis
☐ Course Project
☐ Faculty/Professional/Academic Research
☐ Other: 

Funded: ☑ No  ☐ Yes
(Funding Agency: Type of Funding: Grant Number)

Project Duration (cannot exceed 1 year): 6 months

Principal Investigator’s Address: Jacqueline Keams

Email Address: kear8801@mail.brandman.edu  Telephone Number: 707-694-8533

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Chair Name: Dr. Phil Pendley

Email Address: pendley@brandman.edu  Telephone Number: 951-712-2085

Category of Review:
☐ Exempt Review  ☑ Expedited Review  ☐ Standard Review

Brandman University IRB Rev. 11.14.14 Adopted November 2014
I have completed the NIH Certification and included a copy with this proposal.

- [ ] NIH Certificate currently on file in the office of the IRB Chair or Department Office.

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Signature of Principal Investigator: Jacqueline Kearns  
Date: June 22, 2015

Signature of Faculty Advisor/Sponsor/Dissertation Chair: Dr. Phil Pendley  
Date: June 21, 2015
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
IRB APPLICATION ACTION – APPROVAL
COMPLETED BY BUIRB

IRB ACTION/APPROVAL

Name of Investigator/Researcher:

☐ Returned without review. Insufficient detail to adequately assess risks, protections and benefits.

☐ Approved/Certified as Exempt from IRB Review.

☐ Approved as submitted.

☑ Approved, contingent on minor revisions (see attached)

☐ Requires significant modifications of the protocol before approval. Research must resubmit with modifications (see attached)

☐ Researcher must contact IRB member and discuss revisions to research proposal and protocol.

Level of Risk:  ☐ No Risk  ☑ Minimal Risk  ☐ More than Minimal Risk

IRB Comments:

Application Approved with Additional Information Requested. BUIRB understands that the superintendent interview questions will be developed after they have taken the Grit survey; however, BUIRB would like a copy of the script "foreshadowed questions" that the participating superintendents could be reasonably anticipate being asked in the interview.

Alan Enomoto  
Telephone: (925) 930-2020  Email: enomoto@brandman.edu

BUIRB Chair: ______________________________  Date: ______________________________

REVISED IRB Application  ☑ Approved  ☐ Returned

Name: ______________________________

Telephone: ______________________________  Email: ______________________________  Date: ______________________________

Keith Larick  
BUIRB Chair: ______________________________

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

ELECTRONIC INFORMED CONSENT – Superintendents

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Jacqueline Kearns

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ELECTRONIC SURVEY: The purpose of this study is to examine the character trait of grit in California superintendents as measured by the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale. The study will strive to discover superintendent’s perception of their level of grit as well as what personal and professional attributes contribute to that level of grit. It is also the purpose of this study to discover if there is a significant difference in the superintendents self-reported level of grit and subordinates perception of their superintendent’s level of grit.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this electronic survey, you can withdraw at any time. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions regarding your level of grit. Each participant will use a three digit code for identification purposes. The researcher will keep the identifying codes safeguarded in a locked file drawer to which the researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Jacqueline Kearns at kear8801@mail.brandman.edu

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate. If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button.

The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

☑️ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights” (hyperlink). I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

☑️ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey
ELECTRONIC INFORMED CONSENT – Subordinates

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Jacqueline Kearns

THE FOLLOWING WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE ELECTRONIC SURVEY: The purpose of this study is to examine the character trait of grit in California superintendents as measured by the Duckworth 8-Item Grit Scale. The study will strive to discover superintendent’s perception of their level of grit as well as what personal and professional attributes contribute to that level of grit. It is also the purpose of this study to discover if there is a significant difference in the superintendents self-reported level of grit and subordinates perception of their superintendent’s level of grit.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this electronic survey, you can withdraw at any time. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions regarding your superintendent’s level of grit. Each participant will use a three digit code for identification purposes. The researcher will keep the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer to which the researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Jacqueline Kearns at kear8801@mail.brandman.edu

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “agree” button indicates that you have read the informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate. If you do not wish to participate in this electronic survey, you may decline participation by clicking on the “disagree” button.

The survey will not open for responses unless you agree to participate.

□ AGREE: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights” (hyperlink). I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.

□ DISAGREE: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey
Script

VERBAL INFORMED CONSENT – Superintendent Phone/In-Person Interview

INFORMATION ABOUT: The Examination of Grit in California Superintendents

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Jacqueline Kearns

The purpose of this study is to examine the character trait of grit in California superintendents. Interview questions have been generated based on the initial survey results from superintendents and their subordinates. This portion of the study will strive to discover superintendent’s perception of their level of grit as well as what personal and professional attributes contribute to that level of grit.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this interview, you can withdraw at any time. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. The survey questions will pertain to your perceptions regarding your level of grit. Each participant will use a three digit code for identification purposes. The researcher will keep the identifying codes safe-guarded in a locked file drawer to which the researcher will have sole access. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Jacqueline Kearns at kear8801@mail.brandman.edu

The Informed consent packet and Bill of Rights can be found at: lb.brandman.edu/guideline_forms/researchparticipansbillofrights.pdf

Please state your name, today’s date, and if you agree or disagree to participate in this interview.