

How Property Tax Caps and Funding Formulas Have Changed the Role of the School Superintendent in Indiana

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There has been debate among states as to how to properly fund schools. The debate has been focused on how much funding is supplied through property tax and is motivated by tax payer anger over fluctuating tax bills. Many of the policies have been implemented without looking at the effects that they will have on schools, especially in Indiana, which saw dramatic restructuring of its school funding mechanism and property tax structure. This qualitative study explores the effects of how the current school funding mechanism and property tax caps has changed the job of the school superintendent in Indiana and to elucidate the superintendents' understanding of a general fund referendum, and how the superintendents perceive their role in light of the new financial realities of their school districts.

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Many States are in the process of debating funding formulas that are fair and equitable within the context of what is a uniform and suitable education for the students of that state, such as for funding remediation of underperforming students in New York (The Campaign for Educational Equity, 2015, p. 1), funding for “adequate” teachers of students in the context of teacher layoffs in California, and budget cuts in Indiana (School Funding News, 2010, p. 1). In Indiana, the combination of the State funding formula changes and property tax cap implementation since 2008 have led to a situation where school districts have had to implement general fund referenda, a ballot initiative that schools may use to petition the public to increase the tax rate above the capped property tax rate and those funds are directed to the school district’s operational budget. As of May of 2016, there have been 77 general fund referenda, with 46 passing and 31 failing (CEEP Database, 2016). With the need for Indiana school districts and their leadership to participate in referendum campaigns and legislative lobbying to gain enough funding to meet their operation budgets, how does the role of school superintendents in those districts change as a result of this political and lobbying activity? The role of the superintendent as communicator has changed from that of an internal organizational communicator that is building capacity by developing a vision of leadership and direction for their school district (Andero, 2000) to a role that is focused on external politics, in light of the changes to public school funding in Indiana. As of the two-year budget just passed by the 2015 Indiana State Legislature, there was a slight increase in overall education spending, but mostly in the form of a disproportionate increase in charter school funding and in the state voucher program, where per student state funding is used to support private school tuition for that child. This qualitative study was driven by the research question, “What are the impacts of the general fund referenda process on the role of the superintendent?”. The answer to this question were arrived at through these guiding questions that were asked of the superintendent participants during the interview process:

1. What factors made the referendum a success?
2. How do you perceive your role has changed, if at all, as a result of the referendum process?
3. How was the referendum money utilized? How was the money spent?
4. How has the referendum impacted your decisions on student learning?
5. How are you preparing for when the money goes away?

Study Context

Indiana makes an ideal location for a study of this type, because unlike its neighbors, school funding referenda have only begun since 2008; and the process is still new to most communities. The rise in general fund referenda is a result of the fact that Indiana has seen massive reform of its tax and school funding formulas over the past eight years; and as a result, has seen school districts seek litigation as with two major Indiana cases. The first case, *Bonner v. Daniels* (2007, 2008), the plaintiffs sued the then Governor and Superintendent of Public instruction over the state’s funding formula. However, the case was thrown out by the State Supreme Court on constitutional grounds that Indiana’s General Assembly, not the Indiana Constitution, was responsible for guiding and developing a system of adequate education (National Educational Access Network, 2016). The second case, *Hamilton Southeastern Schools, et al v. Daniels* (2010), which was in response to the uniformity of funding to schools. The plaintiffs argued that school funding cuts disproportionately affected their school districts. The case was eventually dropped by the school districts in response to the state changing to a

per student funding formula (National Educational Access Network, 2016). There are two main reasons for the lawsuits: the shifting of the school districts' general funds from a reliable form in local tax support to tuition reimbursement from the state in the form of a less reliable sales tax (Hirth & Lagoni, 2014) and the formula used by Indiana to account for the effects of poverty, known as the complexity index. The changes in how Indiana has funded its school districts in combination with a global recession resulted in a severe revenue shortage for a large number of school districts in the state. As a result of these tax revenue short falls, 65 general fund referenda have been attempted by Indiana School districts since 2008 (CEEP, 2015).

Since local property tax is no longer a source of general fund support, many schools have had to seek additional revenue through general fund referenda in an attempt to prevent staff lay-offs, maintain current programming, and prevent an increase in class sizes (McInerny, 2015). In fact the property tax caps have impacted school districts as a whole, preventing Indiana school districts from collecting 245 million dollars in local property tax revenue (Stokes, 2014). An approximate 33% of Indiana school districts have seen budget shortfalls of greater than 5% of their budget, while an additional 21% of Indiana School Districts have lost more than 10% of their budget due to property tax caps. In 2013 budget decreases combined with receiving less than \$5,400 tuition support per student (Indiana Department of Local Government Finance, 2013), left school districts to publically question how they were going to provide basic services, such as busing students (Moxley, 2013). In fact, 35 of Indiana's school districts experienced losses severe enough to qualify them for aid from the Distressed Unit Appeals Board, which hears appeals from distressed schools and aids in debt restructuring. Though only three schools filed petitions to the board, the cuts made by school districts include areas such as technology and technology support, building maintenance, and staffing (Stokes, 2012). In response to this funding short fall, a group of districts and their leaders who call themselves the Fix-it Coalition of Public Schools, a coalition of 41 of the 65 public school districts earning less than 120 percent of minimal or foundational tuition support, are lobbying for the transfer of more state dollars to their school district budgets. The Fix- it Coalition has been formed as a mechanism to lobby the legislature and the public for more financial support for their schools and schools like them (Indiana Fix-it Coalition, 2015; McCann, 2014). This has led to some public debate and conflict between school districts that are considered affluent and school districts that service a large high-need population (Butts, 2015; Davis, 2014). Much of the debate is in the form of how Indiana determines what its foundation or minimal level of per student funding is and how the "complexity index," or measurement of wealth is determined (Toutkoushian & Michael, 2007).

Role of the Superintendent

In order to explore the role of the superintendent in the current context of financial turmoil a brief perspective on the evolution of role of the superintendent is warranted. The superintendent, in its modern form as a position separate and superior to the other roles, originated as early as the 1830s in large urban centers and were established in most large cities by the 1890s (Andero, 2000). The superintendent position evolved out of the national movement of curriculum standardization where the position was seen as the "master teacher" or "Teacher of Teachers"; the responsibility was placed on the superintendent to hire, train, and mentor teachers (Kowalski, 2005a). The role of superintendent is thought to have developed over time into four distinct but continuous and overlapping stages, distinguished by the major internal and external influences on the position: The Teacher of Teachers,

Manager, Statesman, and Applied Social Scientist, which are part of the ever-changing role of the position (Kowalski, 2006). The role of the superintendent has adapted and been influenced by the social and political contexts of the schools and the communities in which they have existed, including the many perceptions of the public on the roles and purposes of the school in the community (Kowalski, 2005b). This is shown again by Kowalski (2005a) who describes the emphasis on managerial skills, instead of instructional leadership of the teacher of teachers, that was a product of the industrial age and the desire to have efficient and effective management of the infrastructure and personnel that mirrored the factories of the late 1800s and early 1900s. However, much of the modern role has been influenced by the ever-increasing demands on schools for skill competency of all students and the reduction of resources to accomplish this goal (Bredeson, 1995). The role of the superintendent has been charged with producing a scientifically-based and unified curriculum. This task requires formal and informal training on communication within the organizational structure of the school.

Politics and the Superintendent

How does politics influence the role of the superintendent? Research studying political communication by the superintendent has been limited to the study of communication within the context of local politics. Up until now, the majority of research has examined the interplay between the local culture and political environments, and between the superintendent and the elected officials and their electorate. The focus has been on the interplay between local officials and their influence on school leadership; as in a study on the effect of gender and local politics in regard to rural and Southern cultural perspectives, which shows that local political contexts can make it difficult for women to effectively lead in cultures biased against women (Grogan, 2008; Gammill & Vaughn, 2011). In addition, there have been examinations of the interactions between the superintendent and local school boards or town mayors where mayors have exerted influence on school district policy (Hunter, 1997; Petersen and Short, 2002; Fusarelli, 2006). These studies show that successful superintendents must pay attention to how they communicate and how their words and actions are interpreted within the local cultural and political contexts of the community. Political communication, in these contexts, tends to be focused on an outward-in political influence where superintendents are reacting or responding to political communication about the school district or the superintendents, themselves. Political communication has been identified as a need of the job of superintendent. However, surveys of opinions of school superintendents show a large majority of respondents stating that their training in political speech and activity is lacking and as explored in a study of superintendents in Illinois (Tripses, et al., 2013) and a study of new superintendents in California, Missouri, North Carolina, and Ohio (Petersen, G.J, Fussarelli, L.D., & Kowalski, T.J., 2008). In each of these research articles, the superintendents state that they wished they had more training related to politics through case studies and internship opportunities. Furthermore, until now, there has not been a study of political interactions of the superintendent beyond the local context. What the results of this current study of funding factors that influence the role of superintendent shows is that, at least for the superintendents who participated in this study, political communication has expanded beyond local politics and local political influence. In fact, the superintendents are acting as quasi-political figures, exerting influence on state legislators, state and local legislation, and on the electorate of their community. As non-elected political figures, they are exerting an inward-out type of political communication. This is a novel type of communication, is not

documented in the research of the public school superintendency. In fact, it is a phenomenon that has been mostly observed and studied in politicians and professional lobbyists (Gabel, 2011; Soukup, 2014). Much of the need for political communication and campaign management is based on the need to implement general fund referenda, superintendents' only legal mechanism for gaining funding beyond the state per student tuition reimbursement.

Method

The research model for this study blends the hermeneutical and phenomenological constructs for interpreting and understanding lived experiences with the cultural contexts of the subjects and their interpretations of an event or phenomenon. The research process, which is outlined in *Figure 1* below, is reliant on the data gathered from semi-structured interviews. These interviews were designed to understand how the superintendents interpret their experiences related to the passage of a general funding referendum for their school districts.

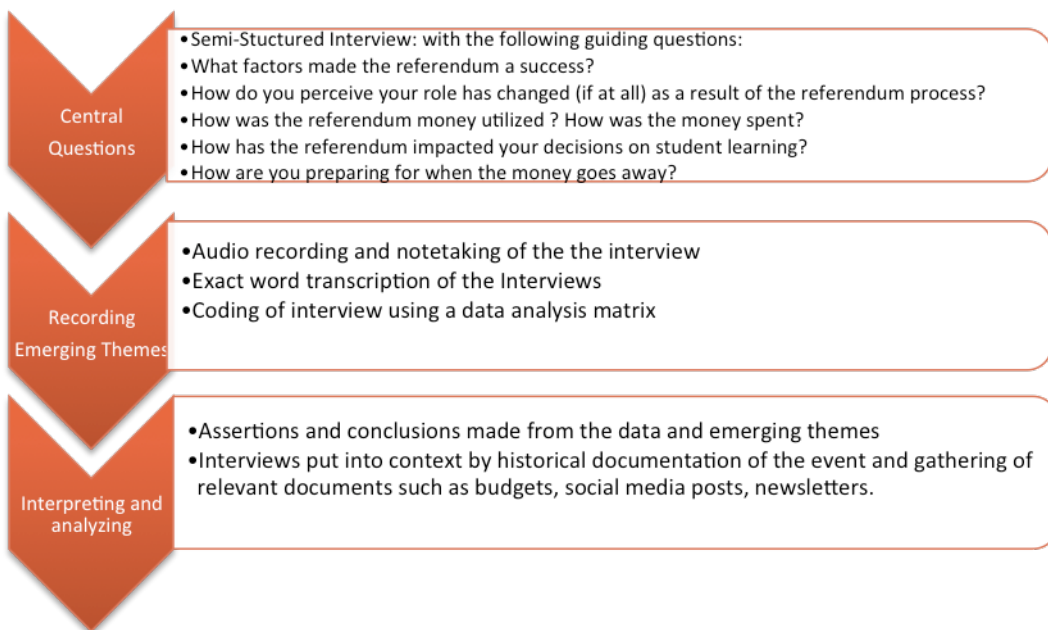


Figure 1. Flow chart – Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Design of this study.

It is this basic scientific process of data collection, interviews and transcription that allows for validity of the interpretation (Tordes & Galvin, 2008). In addition, implementation of the use of three different data collection pieces for triangulation, the process of truth checking by using multiple sources to validate a phenomenon, was used for this study. The three points used are subject selection, utilization of the same semi-structured interview format for each subject, and the use of publicly available resources to contextualize the subjects' statements. This helps maintain fidelity of the data through development of themes and selecting the interviewees that work in similar cultures or from similar institutional knowledge of high achieving, high affluence school districts. As a way to aid in coding and organization of themes, we implemented the use of a “data analysis table” which is a combination of qualitative item analysis with a modified version of an unfolding matrix

(Raymond & Padilla, 1996) . The main difference being that the themes were developed from the transcripts, instead of with the interviewees. The matrix was populated by constructs that are derived from the research questions, which were asked during the interview process. As themes evolved during and after the interviews, data were collected and arranged based on these constructs developed independent of the research subjects, using the themes that arose during the separate interviews. These constructs were then added to as each superintendent was interviewed.

Participants

The body of research on successful funding referenda suggests that high achieving school districts from wealthy areas tend to have higher rates of referenda success. To maintain fidelity of the results, all of the participants in this study represent high achieving school districts of wealthy areas (as measured by the relatively low free and reduced lunch students). Participants were selected for this study by a set of inclusion and exclusion data. The idea was to study high achieving school districts of wealthy communities, since these districts were affected most by the removal of property tax support of the general fund. Each participant was a superintendent of a school district during the successful passage of its general fund public referendum. In addition, the school district must be considered high achieving by being in the top 50 of 413 high schools in Indiana (Report, 2015), and having a low poverty rate by having less than 20% of students receiving free and reduced lunch as determined by the Indiana Department of Education. Ultimately, of the 12 qualifying school districts, three agreed to participate in the study. The characteristics of the superintendents and the school districts they serve are described below and in Table 2. Each of the participants agreed to participate on the condition of anonymity, so any identifiers have been eliminated in the following descriptions of the participants, the sources, and the school districts they lead.

Table 2
Characteristics of the School Districts of the Participating Superintendents of this Study – Identifiers have been removed for anonymity.

Eagle #1	Eagle #2	Eagle #3
District has a student population that is under 3000 students, 62.6% white, approximately 15% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The school is rated as an "A" school with over 99% of its students earning a high school diploma (IDOE, 2015). The school district successfully passed a general fund referendum in 2010	District has a student population that is under 6,500 students, 86.4% who are white, and approximately 5% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The school is rated as an "A" school with over 96% of its students earning a high school diploma (IDOE, 2015). The school district successfully passed a three-year general fund referendum in 2012.	District has a student population that is just under 7,000 students, 82.3% who are white, and approximately 16% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The school is rated as an "A" school with over 97% of its students earning a high school diploma (IDOE, 2015). The school district successfully passed a seven-year general fund referendum in 2010.

Eagle #1 is superintendent of a district that has a student population that is under 3000 students, 62.6% white, approximately 15% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The school is rated as an “A” school with over 99% of its students earning a high school diploma (IDOE, 2015). The school district successfully passed a general fund referendum in 2010 despite a vocal and well-funded opposition group, which raised nearly

\$100,000 dollars in the month before the referendum vote that paid for a media campaign (Rinehart, 2010), which included television commercials in opposition to the referendum question (Dangora, 2010). As part of the superintendent's continued publicity campaign about the value of his school district and against what he perceived as harmful legislation, he used the school district's educational foundation as an entity to raise private funds for a documentary that began filming in 2010 (public blog, 2010). The documentary was shown throughout the state at public viewing events and had high well-known pro-public education, anti-reform movement speakers in attendance for a town hall style discussion about the film life cycle (Indiana Code 20-46-1-11 states that "voters in a referendum may not approve a [referendum] that is imposed for more than seven years."), both the superintendent and his opposition are gearing up for the next referenda, according to the superintendent (personal communication, July, 2014).

Eagle #2 is superintendent of a district that has a student population that is under 6,500 students, 86.4% who are white, and approximately 5% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The school is rated as an "A" school with over 96% of its students earning a high school diploma (IDOE, 2015). The school district successfully passed a three-year general fund referendum in 2012, which will expire at the end of the 2015 fiscal year. Eagle #2 was one of the founding members of the "Fix-it Coalition" (McCann, 2014) that was formed to have a joint lobby for the passage of legislation that would "fix" the funding formula in Indiana, so that schools, like the ones in the coalition, would get an increase in per student funding. This increase in funding is controversial because it is seen as an assault on less affluent and lower performing school districts and their budgets (Butts, 2015). As the legislature failed to act in favor of the school districts making up the Fix-it Coalition, by striking out or amending parts of House Bill 1001 of the 2015 session (Rep. Brown, 2015), Eagle #2 went to his school board to request that they move to pass a resolution and was approved unanimously by the board to seek a six-year general fund referenda to go on the November, 2015 ballot (Shambaugh, 2015). The the general fund referendum passed by a 67% for and 33% against the proposal. Eagle #2 and his school district also faces a well-organized and well-funded opposition group, [Town] Taxpayers for Responsible Education, which is led by a local real estate developer, who has demanded paying teachers less money and benefits and getting control of building costs (Wall, 2012).

Eagle #3 is superintendent of a district that has a student population that is just under 7,000 students, 82.3% who are white, and approximately 16% of the students receive free and reduced lunch. The school is rated as an "A" school with over 97% of its students earning a high school diploma (IDOE, 2015). The school district successfully passed a seven-year general fund referendum in 2010, a referendum that asked for 65% of the funds it was predicted to lose due to property tax caps (Superintendent's Public Blog, 2010). Four years into the referendum, Eagle #3 is reporting funding issues and even publically threatened the stoppage of busing by the school district (Davis, 2014). According to Eagle #3, though he did encounter critics of the referendum, "there was little evidence" of an organized opposition to the referendum's passage (Personal Communication, February 2015). The one major difference of Eagle #3's background as a superintendent is, in his own words, "Let me frame some of my answers with a little bit of background: I moved here 19 years ago from [another state]. I was superintendent during an operation and three building referenda. When I came to Indiana, I was proud of the fact that I was able to do that and used that in my interview process, and they didn't care about it at the time; this experience has shown to be useful after all." (Personal Communication, February 2015).

Data and Findings

In this paper, we present evidence of an inherent structural paradigm shift in how the modern day school superintendent conducts business and that the combination of property tax caps and the school funding mechanism in Indiana has put a large number of schools into an uncertain financial state. This financial uncertainty is being compounded in school districts that are seeing an increase in student population and in school districts with a low complexity index (i.e. high wealth). The superintendents of these affected school districts are seeing a shift from the instructional leadership role to a lobbyist and campaign manager role; leaving the superintendents to spending most of their time selling their school districts to their communities so that they support the local school districts in the next general fund referendum and lobbying state legislators to increase the funding from the state to their school district.

After examination and coding of the statements of all three subjects and triangulating the statements against public record, these statements were categorized based on recurring themes. These themes represent the related experience of the group and provides a unique insight into their perception of how the phenomena of the general fund referendum process has changed their role as leader of their school district. As well as their perception of the phenomenon of the referenda, a detailed description of their comments is included in order to develop a picture of the participants' perceptions and aid in the hermeneutic analysis of this study, which is summarized in *Figure 2*. The following descriptions and quotes from the superintendents are arranged by similar subjects and themes. Included are exemplar statements by the subjects that support the idea that the superintendents are experiencing a fundamental shift in their roles as school superintendent.

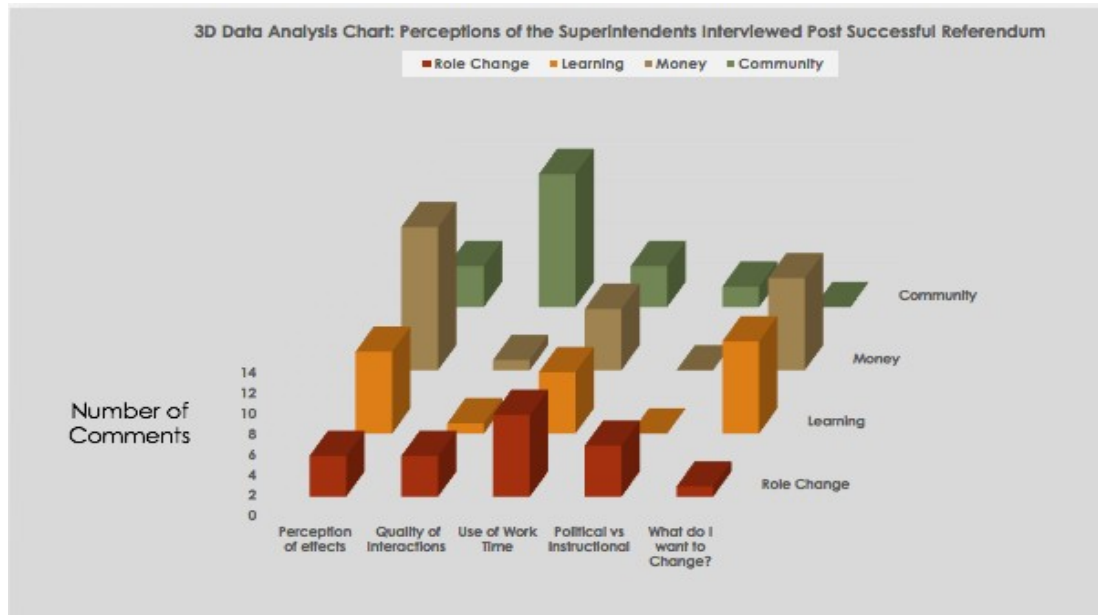


Figure 2. Data Analysis Matrix – Summary of the coded statements from the superintendents of this study.

There were several variations of the same idea shared by each of the subjects interviewed related to the perception of a change in the professional role they play in their school district, detailed in Table 3. It was in a very disappointed tone that they described what they perceived as their “new reality.” This tone can really be summarized by a quote from Eagle

#2, “[Y]ou can see it in [the students’ and parents’] eyes and in the things they say that they don’t see it as plausible that I am an instructional leader.” All the superintendents realized and seemed to come to terms with the idea that their roles included being a political actors and lobbyists for their school district. This was apparent in the cluster of responses that occurred in the expression of their political roles as compared to a time prior to the need for a general fund referendum, where they identified as instructional leaders for the districts.

Table 3

Superintendents’ comments on their perceived role in the district

Political vs. Instructional	Time Use
<p>- “So back in 2008 when we realized we needed to have a referendum to maintain our current staffing for the school district my office really became more of a political office rather than an instructional leader focus.”</p> <p>- “It’s a shame because I didn’t get involved with this position to be a political candidate. I spend a lot less time on curriculum and instruction and a lot more time with the politics of the funding formula than what I did when I was hired.” - “I will tell you right now, I am a lobbyist”</p> <p>-“It’s a shame because I didn’t get involved with this position to be a political candidate.”</p>	<p>- “Prior to the referenda I probably had more of an instructional leadership role”</p> <p>- “I’m always thinking of the political scenarios instead of the structural scenarios that help support the school district.” - “I am getting between 130 and 170 emails a day, those are quite often pieces of the ongoing decision pieces about the district, and do most of that at night, because during the day I am on the phone or working at the state house working with representatives or contacting other superintendents or contacting volunteer organizations.”</p> <p>- “[W]e did a documentary to try and raise funding. We are part of two coalitions trying to rewrite Indiana code.”</p>

A major part of the referendum experience for these superintendents is their perceptions of how the process has affected their ability to improve upon student learning and give the best educational opportunities to all of the children in their school districts as an instructional leader, as detailed in Table 4. All of the superintendents expressed true frustration and helplessness when describing the programs that they had to cut or stop implementation on due to the lack of funding and the insufficient amount of funds raised by the general fund referendum. An interesting finding was that when asked what changes they would make, they emphasized less expensive testing; more focus on hiring, recruiting, and retaining high quality teachers; and less emphasis on tests to evaluate teachers. They believe that these changes could save money in the state budget and could be diverted to funding schools in general.

Table 4

Superintendents' comments on their perception of the effects on student learning

Perception of the effects on the school district	How would they render change?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I spend a lot less time on curriculum and instruction, on student achievement." - "[C]hildren in the school district are facing untenable class sizes" - "We realized that we needed to maintain our system and to maintain our [teacher] staffing." - "That is one thing that I am always having to educate about is that we passed the referendum so we wouldn't have to make cuts, not to implement new programs." - "We haven't added our PTLW class or our IB classes at the high school or the middle school the way we have liked. I would like to have a numeracy person in each building to match our literacy program in each of our elementaries ." - 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Now you have politicians messing with public education. Politicians want 50% of a teacher's evaluation to depend on test scores; well, there are only two subject matters that are even tested. How are you going to do everybody else? And why is there this assumption that a test score is indicative of a quality teacher? Why don't you focus on hiring quality teachers up front and don't worry about it on this end of it?"

Finally, a major effect on the perceived role change that was expressed by these superintendents was how their role has changed in relationship with the community that their school district served, as shown in Table 5. Each superintendent interviewed described the evolution of how he /she interacted with the community and described being more mindful of the political ramifications of every action and comment that originates from the school district. In regard to the quality of interactions and the use of the superintendent's time, each conversation and community interaction was reported as an event with a possible political ramification.

Table 5

Superintendents' Perception of the change in their relationship with their community

Quality of Interactions	Use of Time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "[I]t's cause for some caution and safeguard when you have an election." - "[T]here were many of us who were seen as pariahs, there was that suspicion that you did something wrong, that the money got away from you." - "[W]e think we'll do ourselves a favor with local skeptics in the voting population by pulling out all the stops to get the legislative fix." - "[P]eople in the community came on board because they realized that we were not lying in the first referendum [which was voted down]" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I am spending a lot more time in meetings with organizations with people to not only educate them about the funding process but also keep these lines of communication open." -" [I am] being asked to serve on boards or being part of projects with a local university. I am spending a lot more time in meetings with organizations with people to educate them about the funding process."

The surprising finding from this study is that there seems to be a large disconnect between the financial situation of the school districts and the wealth of the communities that these schools serve. This gets to the crux of this study: How did there get to be such a large disconnect between the wealth of the community and the wealth of the school? This is the context in which these superintendents have had to exist: They are leaders of schools in historically academically successful, and predominately wealthy and affluent areas. In a matter of years, the school districts' funding formula was changed, going from primarily local property tax supported to being completely funded by the state funding formula. With millions of dollars of disparity between what their budgets were then and what they are today, the schools are having to resort to cutting benefits and freezing pay for teachers, putting off maintenance on their buildings and equipment, and having to ask their communities to pay more to support their schools.

What has been established in the data provided by these superintendents is that they perceive that their role has seen a major and permanent paradigm shift as they are leading their district through changes in funding formulas and losses due to property tax caps. As stated by one superintendent, "I will tell you right now, I am a lobbyist...it is a really interesting and sad change." The same idea as stated by a different superintendent, "It's a shame because I didn't get involved with this position to be a political candidate. I spend a lot less time on curriculum and instruction... and a lot more time with the politics of the funding formula than what I did when I was hired." Finally, when talking about the actual referendum campaign, Eagle #3 stated,

[The referendum process] is so all consuming, politically, that the leadership of the district comes to a grinding halt for about 6-7 months leading into the referendum. So that is six months that you are not giving your full attention to educational issues. You are out meeting with people, organizing people, fund raising, it has made the superintendency into a different animal.

As part of the perceived role change, the superintendents seem to have an unease in their new political roles which have changed their roles from what they perceive their jobs should be, as stated by one of the superintendents,

I should be working with the teachers to help them teach our students, because I can't go teach them chemistry, physics or whatever that teacher teaches, so why am I not finding internships and parent volunteers who will help you, which, by the way, all those volunteers

– those volunteer hours are going to be burned on the next referendum. We estimated that there were 7000 volunteer hours that could have been used to help your brightest students get an internship or help tutor your most struggling students. (Eagle #1)

Concluding Discussion

In 1967, philosopher Philippa Foot developed "The Trolley Problem" a thought experiment that was used to study moral dilemmas. The Trolley Problem has had several permutations over the years, but it is told as paraphrased from Thomson (1985):

An out of control trolley is heading on a route that has five workers on the track, unaware of their impending doom. You can avert the disaster by flipping a switch, but that switch diverts the trolley to a track with two workers who are incapable of getting out of the way of the trolley. (p. 1385)

This moral dilemma is similar to the one that superintendents have been forced to make in

school districts in Indiana. The education budget that has been set by the legislature of the State of Indiana has diverted much of that budget, 40 million dollars, to fund private school vouchers (payments to parents of children to pay tuition at private schools instead of public schools) and charter schools, which received a \$1,500 per student increase in tuition support (McInerney, 2015). These are funds that would normally have been used to support traditional public schools. Although none of the schools in the study have charter schools, all school districts in Indiana receive less money due to vouchers statewide. The consequences have been that traditional public school districts are forced to seek additional funds through the general fund referenda process. This has led a structural role change of the school superintendent, where superintendents have shifted their focus from instructional leadership to referenda campaign management and legislative lobbying. Since these school districts are seeing a cycle of shrinking budgets, combined with minimal funding requests in order to successfully pass general fund referenda, school districts are seeing a slow depletion of staffing and school programs. Many of these cuts of staff and programs are ones that support the most disadvantaged of the school districts.

As the debate over the school funding continues in the State of Indiana, school districts and their superintendents try to compete for legislators' time and political will to change the funding formula. In 2015 the Indiana State Legislature passed a two-year budget. That budget included a slight increase in overall education spending, but mostly in the form of charter school funding, an increase in the state voucher program, and a slight increase for suburban schools, such as ones that were part of this study. This left a decrease in overall funding for urban and rural schools (Cook, 2015). Even with this increase in funds to these school districts, two of the superintendents in this study reported planning for their next general fund referendum. The trend for schools seeking extra funding continues as schools of all types push for general fund referenda to supplement budget shortfalls and to meet the needs of their students, including large urban school districts (Morello, 2015). This should signal a need for a look at what constitutes the foundation or minimal level of funding that schools receive in the form of tuition support from the state.

Finally, the need for political actions on the part of the school superintendent should signal a real need for training of future superintendents. In addition to training, specifically about the procedures and laws surrounding school funding referenda, there is clear evidence that the age of the superintendent as political official is here. Institutions that train future school leaders should spend more time and energy preparing them for the types of communications, policies, and actions that are related to running a political campaign (a referendum), lobbying for legislation, and coalition building. The new reality in the foreseeable long and short term is that superintendents will need to have these political communication skills or find and acquire the talent in their cabinets.

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