

# **The Superintendent/Principal: A Position Born in Purgatory**

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*The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the priority level of the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent/principal in Illinois as perceived by board of education presidents, teachers' union presidents, and practicing superintendent/principals in the 102 Illinois school districts utilizing the superintendent/principal model. The findings found agreement in the two roles (chief financial officer and role model) and two responsibilities (financial oversight and build a positive and safe school climate) along with the least important role (politician) and the least important responsibility (oversight/supervision of student activities and extra curricular events).*

**Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research, Vol. 5. Fall 2017 ISSN: 1532-0723**  
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School leadership has evolved since the era of the one-room school with no administrative personnel. Today schools and districts are led by individuals trained for specific roles and responsibilities. The two most prevalent educational leadership positions are the district-level superintendent and the building-level principal. Each position serves schools in unique ways.

The roles associated with the modern superintendency include chief executive officer, chief financial officer, public relations director, community liaison, visionary, role model, politician, human resources director, facilities manager, and educational expert. Superintendents' responsibilities include district financial oversight; policy regulation; district personnel management; district facilities management; professional development; networking; personal professional learning; political involvement; board and staff communication; and attending meetings with staff, board members, constituents, and colleagues (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Hall, 2008; Hesbol, 2005; Houston, 2007; Petersen & Short, 2001).

Today's building principals' roles include instructional leader, change agent, building-level human resource director, building manager, curriculum expert, role model, and communicator. Principals' responsibilities include setting building goals; creating a building's vision; overseeing curriculum; evaluating teachers and support staff; disciplining students; supervising student activities; building relationships; identifying, managing, and participating in professional development; managing building-level personnel issues; meeting with parents, staff, students, and community members; and supervising extra-curricular activities (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Hesbol, 2005; Lortie, 1975).

In districts with declining enrollment, decreased state funding, increased costs, and pressure from community members to keep their schools, superintendents and boards of education look for ways to lower expenditures. Since personnel expenditures make up a significant part of the budget, personnel is often targeted. One cost-saving measure utilized in such districts is reducing administrative costs by combining the positions of superintendent and principal. The dual-role position is referred to as superintendent/principal. This study focused on the roles and the responsibilities of the superintendent/principal.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The superintendent/principal position forces a single administrator to assume two disparate roles. This position poses challenges for the administrator and his or her constituents. Jim Burgett, motivational speaker and former superintendent/principal, described the superintendent/principal as a "position born in purgatory" (Personal Correspondence, 2015) highlighting the torment and often temporary stay of superintendent/principals.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the perceptions of board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals in regards to the priority of the roles and responsibilities of the dual-role administrator. Additionally, this study examined the differences between the groups' perceptions of what were and what were not essential roles and responsibilities. The findings provide superintendent/principals information as they serve in two demanding leadership roles simultaneously.

## Review of the Literature

The superintendent/principal is a complex leadership position that calls upon a single individual to fulfill the responsibilities of two different leadership roles. This review of the literature discusses the roles of superintendent, principal, and superintendent/principal.

The position of superintendent has evolved dramatically since its creation in 1837. Superintendents are no longer merely clerical managers hired to relieve the school board of their day-to-day paperwork. Instead, superintendents are required to demonstrate a variety of skills that necessitate a multi-talented, competent, and inspiring leader (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Chapman, 1997; Geivett, 2010; Kowalski, 2006). Blumberg and Blumberg (1985) noted the importance of creating positive working relationships with and meeting expectations of boards and found that the most critical relationship in running a school system is between the superintendent and the board of education.

The role of building principal has also evolved from a principal-teacher or a disciplinarian to a more complex middle-management role. Sergiovanni et al. (1999) writes that:

The principal's job is to coordinate, direct, and support the work of others by defining objectives, evaluating performance, providing organizational resources, building a supportive psychological climate, running interference with parents, planning, scheduling, bookkeeping, resolving teacher conflicts, defusing student insurrections, placating the central office, and otherwise helping to make things go. (p. 58)

Hence, the combined position of superintendent/principal requires one individual to focus on the responsibilities associated with the district chief executive officer (superintendent) and the building-level leader (principal). The dynamics of the role require one individual to handle almost every leadership role in the district while attempting to provide students with the most successful learning experiences possible (Geivett, 2010). Dragan (1982) conducted a study of administrative principals, a position similar to superintendent/principals, and found:

The expectations that the school board members and teachers have of the administrative principal [superintendent/principal] are very different from those of the superintendent and building principal. School board members expect the administrative principal to act like a superintendent whereas the teachers expect him or her to act more like a building principal. Intense role conflict exists. (p. 10)

In small districts many employees wear numerous hats and have an overabundance of necessary duties that would normally be handled by others in a larger setting. For example, Copeland (2013) detailed several nontraditional duties rural superintendents performed out of necessity: snow shoveling, bus driving, helping in the cafeteria, substitute teaching, taking out the trash, and sweeping floors. For a person serving in the dual-role of superintendent/principal, donning extra hats constitutes added burden to an already full workload.

In order to wear many hats, a leader must have varied skill sets. Schmuck and Schmuck (1989) noted that “superintendents in small towns must be generalists. Often they are the only educator in the central office and must be a jack of all trades” (p. 6). Because of this, rural districts often seek generalists who have a broad range of knowledge and skills to lead their school systems (Kowalski, 2006).

The literature lacks scholarly research on the dual-role position of superintendent/principal. Two studies (Hesbol, 2005; Mattingly, 1994) explored the topic. Hesbol stated “as a dual-role position with no assistance other than through relationships developed among the board of education, school personnel, and the community, the superintendent/principal serves in ways known only to the individual in this position” (p. 8). According to Mattingly's findings,

superintendent/principals and board presidents have differing opinions on both the importance of and functions of the roles of superintendents and principals. He wrote:

The superintendent/principals understand more the intricacies of the roles since they live both of them. If this hypothesis is correct, the indication would be that the BEPs (board of education presidents) do not fully understand the nature of a combined superintendent/principal role. (p. 122-123)

Carter and Cunningham (1997) noted that superintendents must deal with very different factions including school board members, teachers, and unions. Each group has its own idea of the roles and responsibilities of an effective superintendent. Based on the differing perceptions of the superintendent/principal position, this study extends the previous limited research by examining the perception of board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals in regard to the priority of the roles and responsibilities of the dual-role administrator.

## Methodology

A quantitative methodology was chosen for this study in order to examine the phenomenon of the superintendent/principal position "by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematical based methods" (Aliaga & Gunderson, as cited in Muijis, 2004, p. 1). In this study, survey data was gathered from Illinois practicing superintendent/principals along with their school board presidents and teachers' union presidents.

## Research Questions

Four research questions guided this quantitative study:

1. What roles and responsibilities do *board presidents* perceive as essential for superintendent/principals?
2. What roles and responsibilities do *teachers' union presidents* perceive as essential for superintendent/principals?
3. What roles and responsibilities do *superintendent/principals* perceive as essential for superintendent/principals?
4. What differences exist between board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals in their perception of the essential roles and responsibilities for the superintendent/principal?

## The Population and Sample

**Population.** This study was conducted in the State of Illinois. According to the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), 102 Illinois districts employ a superintendent/principal. Of those 102 districts, 28 were urban and 74 were rural. In examining the grade level organization of the study's population, 32 were unit districts (K-12), 65 were elementary districts (K-8), and five were high school districts (9-12).

Three populations comprised this study: currently practicing superintendent principals in the State of Illinois, their board presidents, and their teachers' union presidents. Practicing superintendent/principals were selected for the study because they are employed in the dual-role position and would have first hand knowledge of the phenomenon. This study built upon Hesbol's (2005) research that noted that the superintendent/principal knows the role in "ways only known to

the individual in this position” (p. 8).

Board presidents were selected as a respondent group due to the relationship between a superintendent and board president as an important component in the success or lack thereof of the board-superintendent leadership team. According to Petersen and Short (2001), the school board president’s perception of the superintendent’s abilities is vital to the stability and success of the superintendent.

The final population, teachers’ union presidents, was selected because of the nature of the relationship between the between teachers’ union presidents and the two separate administrative positions: the district-level superintendent and the building-level principal. Union leaders look to superintendents on issues such as contract negotiations, personnel decisions, and program viability (Harris, 1999). On the other hand, teachers and teachers’ union presidents look to building principals for conflict resolution, student behavior management, staff morale, and day-to-day building management (Daresh, 2002). The perceptions of what roles and responsibilities are considered most essential to teachers’ union presidents will assist in better understanding the role of superintendent/principal.

**The sample.** The sample consisted of the individuals who completed the survey: 31 board presidents (31% of the population), 27 teachers’ union presidents (26% of the population), and 65 superintendent/principals (64% of the population). Demographic information for the sample revealed the type of district (predominantly rural), number of teachers supervised (62% of principals supervised 11-20 teachers), grades for which the administrator was responsible (the majority were elementary districts), number of employees supervised by the administrator (75% of superintendents supervised fewer than 51 employees), and whether administrative assistance was available (18% of superintendent/principals had an assistant principal, dean, or head teacher).

## **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for this study was a self-administered (Bourque and Fielder, 1995), cross-sectional survey that collected data at a single point in time from multiple populations (Scott & Morrison, 2006). Three parallel survey instruments were utilized: 1) practicing superintendent/principals, 2) current presidents of the superintendent/principal’s boards of education, and 3) current presidents of the superintendent/principal’s teachers’ union. The surveys were designed to measure the level of agreement and/or variance on what roles and responsibilities of the superintendent/principals were perceived as essential to each group of respondents. Additionally, electronic distribution via SurveyMonkey was selected “to more easily create assessment instruments, distribute to potential respondents, gather and have access to the resulting data” (Marra & Bogue, 2006, p. 7).

For this study, the researcher elected to design a survey rather than use a pre-existing survey. This was because there was no existing survey on the topic. The researcher-developed questions were based on position-related experiences and role and responsibility expectations found in the literature (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Fourteen roles and 20 responsibilities were identified.

Demographic questions were used to determine eligibility including whether the respondent was currently a superintendent/principal, board president, or teachers’ union president and whether the district was currently using the dual-role administrator model of superintendent/principal. If participants responded “no” to either question, they were exited from the survey.

The demographic questions were followed by a series of scaled response questions that asked respondents to consider the level of priority of superintendent/principals’ specific

responsibilities and roles. According to Gall et al. (2007), scaled response scores are used to measure an individual's agreement with various statements about attitudes or beliefs. In this study, the responses "not a priority," "low priority," "medium priority," "high priority," and "essential priority" were used to determine and then compare attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals about the levels of priority of the roles and responsibilities of superintendent/principals.

At the conclusion of the survey, an automated statement was generated expressing gratitude to the participants. The statement included that study results and conclusions would be shared with all superintendent/principal districts in Illinois.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Prior to distribution of the survey, the researcher attempted to make personal contact via telephone and voicemail with the entire population of superintendent/principals study in order to notify them of the forthcoming survey-related email. Telephone contact was made with 41 (40%) of the 101 superintendent/principals and an additional 20 voicemail messages were left for those that could not be reached by phone and had voicemail configured.

A web-based survey instrument, utilizing SurveyMonkey, was distributed to the superintendent/principals serving in Illinois via email with addresses supplied by the ISBE as part of their annual district directory. The initial email about the survey included the information about the study including an explanation of the researcher's background as a doctoral student, information about the nature of the study, assurances of confidentiality, directions for accessing the survey, and an outline of the plans for disseminating the survey to appropriate constituents.

Survey distribution for the board presidents and teachers' union presidents occurred in two ways. First, the email to the superintendent/principals included a request for respondents to provide email contact information for their board presidents and teachers' union presidents. Upon receipt of email addresses from superintendent/principals, the researcher sent surveys to board presidents and teachers' union presidents. This email included the superintendent/principal's support of the study, provided additional information about the study, and included hyperlinks to the appropriate survey. However, only two superintendent/principals provided email contact information for their board presidents or teachers' union presidents, so it was untenable for the researcher to exclusively rely on this option. Thus, the researcher provided a letter designated for board presidents and a second letter for teachers' union presidents as an attachment to an email sent to practicing superintendent/principals. The superintendent/principals were asked to forward the proper attachment to their board president and teacher's union president notifying them of the nature of the research and providing them a survey participation request and the appropriate survey link.

Upon initiating the survey, each respondent was required to consent to participate via an initial page that included all the required consent information<sup>1</sup> and a checkbox stating participants had read and understood the consent form and consented to participate in the research.

In the initial email with the survey's instructions, respondents were informed of the timeframe (initially four weeks) to complete the survey. After the second week, the researcher sent a reminder of the four-week timeframe. An additional reminder email was sent five days prior to

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<sup>1</sup> Information included on the initial page of the survey included the anticipated length of the survey (10 minutes), that the survey was voluntary, that participants could discontinue at any time, and that there were no foreseeable risks to the participant).

the survey closing date to thank those superintendent/principals who had participated and to request assistance in acquiring responses from board presidents and teachers' union presidents.

Due to a low online survey response rate for board presidents and teachers' union presidents, the survey window was extended another two weeks. Additionally, to increase the response rate, paper copies of the survey and survey reminder links were mailed to districts in care of the board president and teachers' union president. Mailing included information about the electronic survey and self-addressed stamped return envelopes to return the paper version.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

The survey data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Demographic data for all three respondent groups was collected and categorized on a nominal scale. A nominal scale produces measures that have no order or quantitative meaning (Gall et al., 2007). Each set of demographic questions was also analyzed to determine frequency and percentage of answer selection.

The first method of analysis determined central tendencies by calculating the mean for perceived levels of priority of superintendent/principals' roles and responsibilities. The first three research questions were analyzed using means and standard deviations to describe the level of priority for each role and responsibility through scaled responses of board of education presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals.

Research question four<sup>2</sup> was analyzed. In order to compare the variance between the scores of board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals. The researcher utilized the univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) test which is "a statistical procedure that compares the amount of between-group variance in individuals' scores with the amount of within-group variance" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 318). Additionally, a Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc test was conducted on all survey items to explore pair-wise comparisons of item means with (<) .01 considered significant. Due to small sample sizes and the differences in sample sizes, the researcher elected to use Test of Between-Subject Effects level of .01 as significant. A partial Eta<sup>2</sup>-level of .25 or higher was considered significant.

## **Key Findings**

Based on the data analysis, key findings were identified. Key findings on time allocation and the dual-role position and district's long-term survival along with findings about the roles and responsibilities as identified by all three respondent groups will be presented.

### **Time Allocation**

Participants were asked what percentage of time a superintendent/principal should spend on superintendent responsibilities versus principal responsibilities. All three groups indicated that more time should be spent on superintendent duties than principal duties. Board presidents responded that superintendent/principals should spend an average of 60% of their time on superintendent responsibilities and 40% on principal responsibilities. Teachers' union presidents indicated that superintendent/principals should spend an average of 50.2% of their time on

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<sup>2</sup> What differences exist between board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and current superintendent/principals in their perception of the essential roles and responsibilities for the superintendent/principal?)

superintendent responsibilities and an average of 49.8% on principal responsibilities. Superintendent/principals responded that they should spend an average of 52% of their time on superintendent responsibilities and an average of 48% on principal responsibilities. Notably, time allocation represents a disparity of almost 10% in the allocation of time related to superintendent duties between board presidents and the two other respondent groups.

### **The Combined Position and District Survival**

All three respondent groups overwhelmingly indicated that the combined superintendent/principal role was essential in the long-term survival of their school districts. Eighty percent of board presidents and 69% of teachers' union presidents responded that the combined role was a key factor in the long-term survival of their school district. Eighty-two percent of superintendent/principals responded that the combined role was a key factor in the long-term survival of their school district.

### **Most Essential Roles According to Board Presidents (RQ1)**

While several roles received priority ratings of high and essential, the high frequency of essential ratings for *role model* (M=4.57) and *chief financial officer* (M=4.50) combined with receiving the highest mean scores (see Table 1), indicates that board presidents value a superintendent/principal that serves as an example for others and understands the district's finances. Based on frequency counts, *chief financial officer* was selected as essential more often than any other role. *Role model* received the second most essential ratings. Considering frequency and mean data from board president responses, both *role model* and *chief financial officer* could be regarded as the most essential roles of superintendent/principals.

### **Least Essential Role According to Board Presidents**

The data indicated board presidents view the role of *politician* (M=2.75) as the least essential, as it received, no selections of essential by board presidents. The next lowest mean was one point higher.

### **Most Essential Responsibilities According to Board Presidents (RQ2)**

According to survey data, as demonstrated of Table 2, board presidents believe that the most essential responsibility of superintendent/principals is *oversight of the district's finances and budgeting* (M=4.75) which received the highest mean and the greatest frequency of essential ratings (22).

While district financial oversight/budgeting may be considered the most essential responsibility for superintendent/principals according to board presidents, the fact that data showed three other responsibilities with a mean score of 4.50 or higher indicates that board

Table 1

*Side-by Side Mean Scores from all Respondent Groups for Each Role*

Role	Board President	Teachers' Union	Superintendent/ Principals
Role Model	4.57	4.46	4.69
Chief Financial Officer	4.50	4.49	4.77
Visionary Leader	4.43	4.08	4.35
Evaluator of Educator Performance	4.39	4.22	4.38
Building-level Communicator	4.21	4.15	4.42
Change Leader	4.19	3.69	4.25
Human Resource Manager	4.18	4.19	4.05
Public Relations/Communication Officer	4.14	4.22	4.11
<b><i>Instructional Leader</i></b>	<b><i>3.93</i></b>	<b><i>3.56</i></b>	<b><i>4.54</i></b>
<b><i>Educational Expert/Instructional Leader</i></b>	<b><i>3.82</i></b>	<b><i>3.69</i></b>	<b><i>4.28</i></b>
Building Manager	3.79	3.69	4.13
Disciplinarian	3.79	3.85	3.93
Curriculum Expert	3.75	3.41	3.84
Politician	2.75	2.88	3.08

*Note: The roles with significant variance between the three respondent groups are indicated with bold italics.*

presidents find four responsibilities as essential priorities. Superintendent/principals should be aware that board presidents are looking for a leader who also builds a positive and safe school climate, evaluates teachers and staff and makes building-level personnel recommendations, and builds relationships and establishes trust.

### **Least Essential Responsibility According to Board Presidents**

The responsibility of *oversight and supervision of student activities/extracurricular events* received the lowest mean score (M=3.39) and the lowest frequency of essential selections (five) by board presidents. With these scores, this responsibility can be considered the lowest priority of the 20 responsibilities in this study. However, it is worth noting that the mean score does not indicate that it is considered a low priority or not a priority by board presidents.

### **Most Essential Roles According to Teachers' Union Presidents (RQ2)**

Teachers' union presidents value the roles of *role model* and *chief financial officer* most in a superintendent/principal. With a mean difference of .03 between *chief financial officer* (M=4.49) and *role model* (M=4.46), coupled with the fact that both roles received more essential ratings than any other role, data indicates that these are the top two most essential roles for the superintendent/principal according to the teachers' union presidents who completed the survey.

### **Least Essential Role According to Teachers' Union Presidents**

Teachers' union presidents placed a very low priority level on the role of *politician*. With a mean score of 2.88, four ratings of not a priority, and the only mean score under 3.00, data indicates the role of politician is a significantly lower priority than any other role.

Table 2  
*Side-by Side Mean Scores from all Respondent Groups for Each Responsibility*

Responsibility	Board President	Teachers' Union	Superintendent/ Principals
District Financial Oversight/Budgeting	4.75	4.56	4.79
Build a Positive and Safe School Climate	4.68	4.41	4.59
Evaluate Teachers and Staff and Make Building-level Personnel Recommendations	4.54	4.26	4.35
<b><i>Relationship Building/ Establishing Trust</i></b>	<b><i>4.50</i></b>	<b><i>4.07</i></b>	<b><i>4.56</i></b>
District Personnel Manager	4.43	4.04	4.20
Focus on Student Learning	4.36	3.93	4.33
Being Visible and Accessible	4.25	4.30	4.57
Manage Student Discipline and Resolve Parental Concerns	4.25	4.04	4.02
<b><i>Improve Curriculum and Instruction</i></b>	<b><i>4.19</i></b>	<b><i>3.74</i></b>	<b><i>4.28</i></b>
Evaluate Educational Programs	4.18	4.63	4.07
Create Vision, Mission, and Goals	4.14	4.00	4.18
District Community Relations	4.14	4.11	4.37
Collaborative Goal Setting	4.11	3.93	3.90
Planning and Scheduling	4.11	3.44	3.90
Provide Staff Professional Development	4.00	3.74	3.90
Professional Learning	3.96	3.81	4.02
District Property Management	3.93	3.93	3.93
Policy Making	3.79	4.04	3.85
Networking/Attending Professional Meetings	3.57	3.78	3.55
Oversight and Supervision of Student Activities/Extracurricular Events	3.39	3.44	3.55

*Note: The roles with variance between the three respondent groups are indicated with bold italics.*

### **Most Essential Responsibility According to Teachers' Union Presidents**

The most essential responsibility, as perceived by teachers' union presidents, was district *financial oversight/budgeting* (M=4.56) with a mean .15 higher than the next highest mean. Additionally, *financial oversight/budgeting* received the greatest number ratings as essential.

### **Least Essential Responsibilities According to Teachers' Union Presidents**

Two responsibilities received the lowest mean score of 3.44, as well as only three ratings of essential each. Those responsibilities were *planning and scheduling* and *oversight and supervision of student activities/extracurricular events*. It should be noted, with mean scores of 3.44, data indicates that the teachers' union presidents on average do not consider the two roles as low priorities.

### **Most Essential Roles According to Current Superintendent/Principals (RQ3)**

Superintendent/principals rated *chief financial officer* (M=4.77) as the most essential role of the superintendent/principal position. Two additional roles received mean scores over 4.50: *role model* (M=4.69) and *instructional leader* (M=4.54). These two roles could also be considered essential. Each of the three roles was rated as essential or high priority by 95% or more of the superintendent/principals. Notably, 11 of the 14 roles received a mean score over 4.00 from the superintendent/principal respondents.

### **Least Essential Role According to Current Superintendent/Principals**

Superintendent/principals identified *politician* (M=3.08) as the least essential priority. However, frequency data indicated that this does not mean the role is not important. Sixty-two percent of superintendent/principals rated politician as a medium priority or higher.

### **Most Essential Responsibilities According to Current Superintendent/Principals**

According to the mean score data, superintendent/principals consider *district financial oversight/budgeting* (M=4.79) as the most essential responsibility for the superintendent/principal position. Eighty-four percent of superintendent/principals rated district financial oversight/budgeting as essential. In addition to *district financial oversight/budgeting*, three other responsibilities—*building a positive and safe school*, *being visible and accessible*, and *relationship building/establishing trust*—all received means over 4.50. Thus, all the responsibilities mentioned could be considered essential responsibilities.

### **Least Essential Responsibilities According to Current Superintendent/Principals**

The least essential responsibilities according to superintendent/principal mean data are *networking/attending professional meetings* (M=3.55) and *oversight and supervision of student activities/extracurricular events* (M=3.55). These scores were .30 lower than the next lowest score. It should be noted that 78% of superintendent/principals rated *networking and attending professional meetings* as a medium or higher priority and 86% rated *oversight and supervision of student activities/extracurricular events* as a medium priority or higher.

## **Significant Differences Between Respondent Groups in Their Perceptions of Role and Responsibility Priorities for Superintendent/Principals (RQ4)**

**Instructional leadership.** The data from the one-way ANOVA combined with the frequency and mean data showed significant difference for instructional leadership in the level of priority held by superintendent/principals (M=4.54), board presidents (M=3.93), and teachers' union presidents (M=3.56). The most significant difference was in the .99 mean difference between the superintendent/principal and teachers' union presidents. The difference is even more prominent in the frequency data with 49% of teachers' union presidents rating instructional leadership as a medium or lower priority. On the other hand, 95% of superintendent/principals rated the role as a high or essential priority.

**Educational expert/instructional leader.** The role of *educational expert/instructional leader* is another area in which there was significant difference in the perceptions between groups. The one-way ANOVA data combined with mean and frequency data showed a significant difference between the teachers' union presidents (M=3.69) and superintendent/principals (M=4.28). The mean difference of .58 led to a significance level of .002. Frequency data showed that 52% of teachers' union presidents surveyed rated the role as a medium priority or lower, while 92% of superintendent/principals surveyed rated the role as a high or essential priority. While not statistically significant, the post hoc LSD test showed a significance level of .015 for the mean difference (.44) between superintendent/principals and board presidents which could be considered *educationally* significant. Educational or practical significance according to Kirk (1996) "is concerned with whether the result is useful in the real world" (p. 1). Furthermore, nearly 40% of the board presidents rated the role educational expert/instructional leader as a medium or lower priority.

**Relationship building/establishing trust.** The frequency and mean data combined with the one-way ANOVA for the responsibility *relationship building/establishing trust* showed a significant difference in the perception of the responsibility between teachers' union presidents (M=4.07) and superintendent/principals (M=4.56). The mean difference of .48 produced a significance level of .001. It should be noted that while there is significant difference in the mean data, frequency data does not reflect a rating of low priority. Eighty-five percent of each group of respondents rated the responsibility as a high or essential responsibility. While not statistically significant, the post hoc LSD test showed a significance level of .011 for the mean difference (.43) between board presidents and teachers' union presidents which could be considered *educationally* significant.

**Improving curriculum and instruction.** The final responsibility that showed significant difference in the perception of priority was *improving curriculum and instruction*. The one-way ANOVA produced a mean difference of .54 and *p*-level of .001 between teachers' union presidents (M=3.74) and superintendent/principals (M=4.28). Again, it should be noted that this level of significance does not indicate that the responsibility is considered a low priority for either group of respondents. Frequency data indicated that 77% of teachers' union presidents and 87% of superintendent/principals rated the responsibility as a high or essential priority.

## Discussion

### Research Questions One, Two, and Three

The intent of research questions one, two, and three was to determine which roles and responsibilities of the superintendent/principal are considered the most essential to board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and practicing superintendent/principals. Each respondent group was presented with the same set of roles and responsibilities to rate on a continuum from not a priority through an essential priority. Fourteen roles and 20 responsibilities were selected by the researcher based on the review of literature and experience in the position of superintendent/principal.

**Most essential roles for the superintendent/principal.** The convergence of the data gathered through the use of SPSS presented similar findings for the two most essential roles and responsibilities from all three respondent groups. The two most essential roles for superintendent/principals according to all three respondent groups were *role model* and *chief financial officer*.

Boards appear to desire, above all other roles, leaders who act in a manner that others respect and emulate. Teachers' union presidents and superintendent/principals concur ranking *role model* second. This finding is supported by Glass et al. (2000) who stated "For the superintendency to survive and flourish in the 21st Century, superintendents will need to serve as role models, demonstrating the high degree of professionalism necessary to increase their influence" (p. 6). Preston et al. (2013) added that school leaders are expected to participate in community events, join local civic organizations, serve as role models, operate under the microscope of the community, and try to meet extremely high expectation levels set by the community.

All three groups also appeared to desire a superintendent/principal who is skilled as *chief financial officer*. As chief financial officers, superintendent/principals create and monitor district budgets, expenditures, receipts, and financial trends. The priority of this role by all three groups is congruent with the Illinois School Board Association's Policy 3:10, which guides the expectations of superintendents. Among numerous roles the policy lists as expectations for superintendent, managing the district's fiscal and business activities to ensure financial health. Additionally, this conclusion is supported by Carter and Cunningham's (1997) findings that the superintendent position shifted from master educator to an expert manager out of the need for a skilled leader in school financial matters.

**Least essential roles for the superintendent/principal.** The data indicated all three respondent groups were in agreement about the least essential superintendent/principal roles. Board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals each rated *curriculum expert* and *politician* 13th and 14th out of the 14 roles. The low rating for *curriculum expert* could be interpreted as a belief that the role is best filled by classroom teachers or someone that takes a significant amount of time to become a curricular expert. Additionally, superintendent/principals and board presidents often do not have the time necessary to become experts in the curricula of the varied subjects taught in today's public schools.

As *politician*, superintendent/principals meet with legislators, community groups, and local leaders to advocate for or against specific education-related issues and topics. This type of work often requires going to legislators' offices, local meetings, or to the state capitol to meet with multiple leaders and legislators which can be difficult for superintendent/principals given the time constraints and no additional administrators in their districts. Another reason *politician* may have

received the least essential rating is the fact that meeting with legislators may be intimidating to some rural leaders. Finally, in light of the negativity associated with the term *politician*, this role may have had a lower rating.

**Most essential responsibilities for the superintendent/principal.** A convergence of data again exists between all three respondent groups as it relates to the priorities among responsibilities for superintendent/principals. The responsibility *district financial oversight/budgeting* was rated as the most essential by board presidents, teachers' union presidents, and superintendent/principals. This responsibility correlated to carrying-out the role of chief financial officer which was also rated highly.

The second most essential responsibility for the superintendent/principal as perceived by all three respondent groups was *building a positive and safe school climate*. This responsibility corresponded with fostering shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation; creating positive relationships with all stakeholders; and creating and implementing systems to ensure a safe, orderly, and productive environment for students and staff (Cotton, 2003; Hill, 2014; Marzano et al., 2005).

**Least essential responsibilities for the superintendent/principal.** It is worth noting that the responsibility that received the lowest ratings for all three groups was *oversight of student activities and extracurricular events*. Notably, this rating contrasts with the researcher's personal experience. In the researcher's district, serving in the role of superintendent/principal often includes supervision responsibilities associated with building-level administration including the long hours required being at all the after-hours school events. Additionally, many rural superintendent/principals would acknowledge that if they are absent from an event, people will notice.

The responsibility *networking and attending professional meetings* was the second lowest rated priority by superintendent/principals and board presidents. The location in rural school districts, a lack of time to get away to meetings, a sense of being able to handle the position "on their own," the financial cost, and the lack of another administrator to leave in charge in their absence are possible reasons superintendent/principals rated this responsibility so low. The aforementioned reasons may also explain why the role *politician* was rated so low.

Teachers' union presidents rated *planning and scheduling* as the second lowest priority responsibility. One possible explanation for the low rating for planning and scheduling may be that teachers appreciate administrators who support their autonomy and decision making to create their own schedules (Cotton, 2003; Lortie, 1975; Marzano et al., 2005).

#### **Research Question Four**

Data analysis revealed that significant differences existed between respondent groups for two roles and two responsibilities. The two roles with significant differences were *instructional leader* and *educational expert/instructional leader*. Additionally, significant discrepancy occurred in the responsibilities of *relationship building/establishing trust* and *improving curriculum and instruction*.

Data showed that significant differences existed in the priority levels assigned to *instructional leader* when comparing board presidents and superintendent/principals as well as between teachers' union presidents and superintendent/principals. Superintendent/principals rated instructional leader as the third most essential role they play in their districts. On the other hand, board presidents and teachers' union presidents rated the role ninth and 11th respectively. In a review of literature, the role of instructional leader was a common expectation for superintendents

and principals. In fact, Illinois School Code states that principals assume administrative responsibilities and instructional leadership under the supervision of the superintendent. Educational administrators are taught from the beginning of their administrative licensure coursework that they are required to be instructional leaders and the primary responsibility of principals is the improvement of instruction. This discrepancy suggests board presidents and teachers' union presidents are not fully informed about what the state-mandated expectations for superintendent/principals are.

Additional disagreement exists between teachers' union presidents and superintendent/principals on the role of *educational expert/instructional leader*. This role is similar to that of instructional leader. Unfortunately, the researcher and expert panel overlooked the similarity in roles during the pilot process. In retrospect, one of the two roles could have been eliminated. On the other hand, the disagreement between the superintendent/principals and teachers' union presidents strengthens the findings regarding the role of instructional leader. Superintendent/principals rated *educational expert/instructional leader* with a mean score of 4.28 while both board presidents and teachers' union presidents rated the role under 4.00.

Disagreement also existed between superintendent/principals and teachers' union presidents on the responsibility *relationship building/establishing trust*. Superintendent/principals rated the responsibility as the fourth most essential responsibility of their job with a mean score over 4.50, while teachers' union presidents rated the responsibility sixth with a mean score just over 4.00. The importance of *relationship building/establishing trust with others* within the district and community was not in question when considering the fact that both groups rated the responsibility as a high or essential priority. Harris (1999) noted "superintendents and union leaders preside over organizations that shape the educational destinies of the children who attend public school districts" (p. 115). With priority levels representing a significant difference between superintendent/principals' and teachers' union presidents' perception of the responsibility, it is important that neither group lose sight of the responsibility. Research shows that *relationship-building/establishing trust* with boards and staff is a vital responsibility for superintendents (Blumberg & Blumberg, 1985; Carter & Cunningham, 1997).

The final area of statistically significant differences in priority for responsibilities was *improving curriculum and instruction*. In the set of 20 responsibilities, teachers' union presidents rated improving curriculum and instruction as the 18th most essential responsibility and in the medium to high priority range, while superintendent/principals rated it eighth and as a high to essential priority. This responsibility correlates to the responsibilities associated with the role of instructional leader which showed a significant difference between groups. The teachers' union presidents' levels of priority for *instructional leader* and *improving curriculum and instruction* indicated that they do not believe that these roles are essential for superintendent/principals. This belief calls into question teachers' union presidents' knowledge of the statutory requirement that superintendents and principals spend a majority of their time improving curriculum and instruction (105 ILCS 5/10-21.4a).

## Concluding Thoughts

Due to the many of roles and responsibilities associated with the position of superintendent/principal, a study of the priority level of the roles and responsibilities of superintendent/principals was appropriate. Gaining the perspectives of board presidents and teachers' union presidents on the dual-role position assisted in the examination of the agreement and disagreement in priority levels of specific roles and responsibilities.

The results of this study can assist current and future superintendent/principals as they navigate the essential roles and responsibilities associated with their dual-role leadership position. Additionally, it is hoped that the results of this study will provide insight to boards of education and teacher unions concerning the challenges superintendent/principals face each day.

The position of superintendent/principal asks a single individual to fulfill the demanding roles and responsibilities of both the district-level superintendent and building-level principal. The inner-workings of the position are often only known to those who have served in the role. The aspects of these roles and responsibilities are varied and time consuming, which can lead to the inability to be fully engaged in either role. Geivett (2010) described the position and individuals who serve as superintendent/principals as "not superhuman. They are not able to do twice the work of their counterparts . . . Superintendent/principals are forced to prioritize their responsibilities, thus oftentimes leaving many important duties undone" (p. 10).

The findings from this study are clear: board presidents and teachers' union presidents consider the roles and responsibilities associated with managing district finances, positive role modeling, and building a safe and positive school climate to be the most essential priorities for their superintendent/principals.

By examining the priority level data of specific roles and responsibilities, this study provides information to the assist superintendent/principals in determining where to focus their attention for effective school and district leadership and to survive what some have called "a position born in purgatory."

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