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ABSTRACT

This report describes a study of the perceptions of central-office supervisors. The purpose of the study was to determine the perceptions of central-office supervisors regarding emerging supervisory practices within a decentralized context. The study further sought to determine the role central-office supervisors perform in exemplary school districts, as well as the contribution they make to enhance student academic success, as determined by standardized measures within a decentralized environment. Data for the study were gathered through a specifically designed questionnaire based on 12 dimensions of supervisory practices developed from previous research. The sample for this study consisted of 59 supervisors in exemplary Texas school districts. The data were analyzed and synthesized using a content-analysis approach. Findings indicated a high level of agreement regarding the dimensions of emerging supervisory practices as reflected in current practice. Additionally, four roles emerged from the participants' responses: curriculum planner, facilitator, staff developer, and resource provider. The data also revealed that central-office supervisors contribute to student success by engaging in a wide range of actions aimed at assisting schools and teachers. The report concludes that emerging supervisory practices indeed are reflected in a decentralized context. (Contains 35 references.) (WFA)

Perceptions of the Role of the Central Office Supervisor in Exemplary Texas School Districts

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Introduction

Current accountability calls demand that schools focus on enhancing student achievement and change their practices in order to assure that all students become successful. Consequently, "these new pressures for change suggest even more demanding roles for instructional supervisors" (Harris, 1998, 23) at all levels. However, the literature suggests that research on emerging roles of central office supervisors is limited. While extensive studies have focused on the role and responsibilities of other district supervisory roles such as the superintendent (Carter, 2002), few recent studies addressed the role and functions of the central office supervisor. For instance Pajak, Adamson, and Rhoades affirm that "the supervisory role at the school district-central office level in curriculum and instruction has largely been ignored by researchers and theorists, and is often misunderstood and maligned by policy makers" (1998, p. 667). As a result there is a limited understanding of the contributions, concerns and struggles of those who are placed in supervisory roles at central or district level within decentralized contexts. As school districts embrace school-based decision-making, new concerns and debates question the role of the central level supervisor, "its purpose, and its place in public education." (Steller, 1994, as cited in Pajak, et. al, 1998, 667). Moreover, the position of central office supervisor of curriculum and instruction remains tenuous and in constant jeopardy, specially during times of financial exigency" (Pajak, et. al, 1998, p. 667).

Previous research attempted to document the daily work of district level supervisors and has reported that their work schedules reflect fragmented activities and that they have freedom in initiating supervisory tasks (Sullivan, 1980; Donmoyer & Neff,

1983). Others focused on descriptions "of the position of the central office instructional supervisor as it is experienced and described by practitioners" (Pajak, 1988, p. xiv). Further, others report that different perceptions existed between generalists and specialists in the importance they ascribed to dimensions of identified supervisory practice (Smith, 1990). Although these and other related studies emphasize the importance of the central office supervisor, additional studies which document their contributions to school improvement, innovations and change in the current accountability context are needed to clarify our understanding of this role (Pajak, et. al, 1998; Harris, 1998; Carter, 2002). Similarly, suggestions for further inquiry emphasize the need to use qualitative approaches that may illuminate the actual contributions of central office supervisors (Firth & Pajak, 1998).

Thus, reported here are the results of a study conducted following a combined methodological approach. Its main focus was on the perceptions of central office supervisors regarding emerging supervisory practices as redefined by Pajak (1992) and their roles and contributions to enhance student achievement. To this end, the perspective that served as the theoretical framework, the research procedures, findings and research implications are presented.

Theoretical Perspective

The continuing demands for accountability in education have placed a renewed emphasis on the need to clarify the role and contributions of all educational personnel, including school supervisors. Similarly school decentralization and change also dictate additional roles and responsibilities not only for campus personnel but also for central

office supervisors without resort to careful assessment of needs and alternative avenues of action. Consequently, there is a call for new forms of supervisory leadership to give vision and to create acceptance of the current challenges to create fundamentally high quality education for all in the 21st century (Harris, 1998). Others also suggest that "advocates of restructuring review the roles of supervisors and establish supervisory practice in terms of promoting the interests of teachers and students under alternative and emerging forms of school organization" (Pajak, et. al, 1998, p. 867).

Given the current educational context, Fullan also affirms that educational personnel "operate under a microscope in a way they never had before. This new environment is complex, turbulent, contradictory, relentless, uncertain, and unpredictable. At the same time, it has increased the demands for better performance and greater accountability" (2000, p. 582). Thus, in light of these ever-changing educational realities, it is relevant to turn our attention to the emerging supervisory practices, and the subsequent roles and contributions of central office supervisors.

This study was framed based on two perspectives that served as the theoretical foundation. First, school supervision can be explained through dimensions of supervisory practice, initially derived by Pajak, 1988 and confirmed by others (Smith, 1990; Fitzgerald, 1993) and later redefined (Pajak, et.al, 1998). Second, the work of supervisors can be determined through a clarification of their roles including their contributions to enhance student achievement. As Fullan argues, "the role of the district office is to help schools sort out and implement the right choices" (1991). However, roles tend to have a certain level of variability depending on the institutional expectations and the

expectations of whom they tend to serve. Therefore, it is imperative to understand what role central office supervisors tend to play in schools that claim to be successful as measured by standardized measures of achievement.

Dimensions of Supervisory Practice

A renewed interest in clarifying and delineating the work of school supervisors has emerged in light of the decentralization and restructuring of schools. Researchers and practitioners have attempted to shed light on the functional areas of central office supervisors by either defining supervisory competencies (Cawelti, 1980; Hopkins, 1982; Kyle 1984; Leithwood &Steinbach, 1993) or supervisory task areas (Harris, 1985, Bailey, 1985). One extensive research effort to delineate the job of the school supervisor is found in Pajak's study (1989) to identify and prioritize "dimensions" of supervisory practice of central office personnel. This study was based on a nation-wide survey of outstanding supervisors and university professors. From this research, 12 highly recognized dimensions were defined. These included: communications, staff development, instructional program, planning and change, motivating and organizing, observation and conferencing, curriculum, problem solving and decision-making, service to teachers, personal development, community relations, research and program evaluation (Pajak, 1989). These 12 dimensions of supervisory practice were later confirmed as important to the central office supervisor role (Smith, 1990).

However, these 12 dimensions of supervisory practice were later re-analyzed and re-defined, given the emerging restructuring efforts within a decentralized context in education. According to Pajak, "the emerging practices in U. S. schools is an expression

of the restructuring movement in American education; which is redefining roles and responsibilities in schools" (1992, p. 127). More specifically, such practices reflect an "emerging definition of school organization as it relates to supervision and discusses the implications of this redefinition for the role of the central office supervisor of curriculum and instruction." (Pajak, 1992, p. 127).

The above named dimensions acquire a different perspective when considered within the practice of decentralization which embraces a school-based management also referred to as school-based decision making paradigm. Thus, these dimensions of supervisory practice would be enacted as follows:

> **Communication** becomes richer and more inclusive, and more opportunities are created for people to participate and commit themselves to an emerging vision.
> **Staff development** needs are identified by teachers themselves, who actively plan programs and make presentations to colleagues.
> **The instructional program** is more likely to be coordinated by groups of teachers who share the same students, subject, or grade level and who engage in frequent discussions about teaching.
> **Planning and change** are guided by a clear vision and sense of mission within the district. Innovation, experimentation, and risk taking are encouraged in order to rethink and redesign how things are done.
> **Motivating and organizing** are based on group participation and contribution to the achievement of collective aims measured by multiple indicators of success.
> **Classroom observation and conferences** are tasks more often performed by teachers themselves in peer coaching arrangements. Less able teachers learn from observing their more competent , and beginning teachers are paired with more experienced mentors.
> **Curriculum** is developed and coordinated by teachers on grade level or subject-matter teams who are familiar with students needs and interests. It is viewed as a relevant, vital and never ending process.
> **Problem solving and decision making** are delegated to teachers and administrators who are closest to problems of practice. They have the autonomy and flexibility to deal with problems immediately and are encouraged to experiment and learn while doing so.
> **Service to teachers** is targeted toward helping groups achieve the agendas they have set for themselves. Teachers rely more often on their colleagues to both give and receive assistance and support.

> **Personal development** is determined by individuals and groups as they reflect on their values, beliefs, and practices, and redefine their roles, responsibilities, and relationships in the school.
> **Community relations** are focused on educating parents and taxpayers about what is happening in schools and involving them in decisions at the local school level to attain consensus from diverse perspectives and constituents.
> **Research and program evaluation** are aimed toward making classrooms and schools centers of inquiry, which inform teachers' decisions about practices that work best for students in each school. (Pajak, 1992 as cited by Pajak, et. al. 1998, p. 680)

A study exploring how school districts transformed their structures, reported that there was a high level of consistency between supervisory behaviors and the 12 dimensions of emerging supervisory practices (Fitzgerald, 1993). Another study focused on the distribution of responsibility for the 12 dimensions in school districts associated with the National Coalition of Essential Schools and the Georgia-based Program for School Improvement. This study reported that a difference of perception, regarding distribution of responsibilities, existed between the central office supervisors and the campus administrators. For example, central office supervisors perceived that most supervisory functions were equally distributed between the school and the district, and campus principals perceived that the school assumed most responsibility (Rhoades, 1995). These and other studies illustrate the lack of agreement regarding the duties of central office supervisors, the ever-changing nature of the central office supervisory function and the current accountability demands to educate all children. As a result, "the central office supervisory position is once again reconfigured to adapt to a new organizational reality" (Pajak, et. al, 1998, p. 682), echoing early assertions that a movement emerging in the late 1980s was "characterized by decentralization, shared decision-making, school--based management, the notion of the principal as instructional

leader, and teacher empowerment" (Pajak, 1992, p. 127). This movement, in turn called for a redefinition of roles and duties of both central office and campus personnel. Therefore, identifying the role of the central office supervisor is imperative in order to determine how it is enacted, particularly, in school districts that have embraced decentralization and have achieved high levels of student success.

The Central Office Supervisor Role

Defining the role of supervisor has become a complicated task. The literature suggests that "the various roles subsumed under the generic term, supervisor" (Galthorn, 1998, p. 374) may refer to a wide range of services provided at different levels, from local to state level. Thus the central office supervisor role may be analyzed from a perspective of the power and influence they exert which may vary depending on the organizational structure and size of the school district. For instance, Glathorn affirms that "the superintendent and the assistant superintendent exert a powerful indirect influence on classroom teachers as they function in positions of line authority with respect to the school board, whom they serve, and the principals, whom they supervise (1998, p. 383). However, it is relevant to recognize that others are also in a position to exert "direct and indirect influence on classroom teachers" (Glathorn, 1998, p. 383). Thus several researchers attempted to characterize the role of the central office supervisor in a generic sense by developing list of tasks of supervision (Harris, 1975). Others have analyzed supervisory activities from a managerial perspective. Using Mintzberg's (1973) analysis of managerial tasks (interpersonal, informational, and decisional), Sullivan (1982)

reported a high incidence in two, the decisional role as resource allocator, and the informational role as monitor and disseminator.

Others focused on the role of the central office supervisor in a change process and report that those placed in line positions had more power than those in staff positions (Hall, Putman, and Hord, 1985). It is also suggested that the supervisor role may be characterized from a functional perspective (Parramore, 1990), while, others affirm that the supervisor role as a manager of resources encompasses four major functions: planning, staff development, program development and assessment (Snyder, Fitzgerald and Giella (1992).

Important efforts have been made to advance the characterization of the central office supervisor role. However, few studies have concentrated on the perceptions of those who perform supervisory duties in schools that have achieved high levels of student success within a decentralized context. Therefore, researchers agree that additional in-depth investigations which focus on this role should be undertaken (Pajak, 1998; Harris, 1998; Galthorn, 1998).

Procedures and Data Sources

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of central office supervisors regarding emerging supervisory practices within a decentralized context. These "dimensions may be thought of as organizational processes that support the improvement of teaching and the professional growth of educators" (Pajak, 1992. P. 129). The study further sought to determine the role central office supervisors perform in exemplary school districts as well as the contributions they make to enhance student

academic success, as determine by standardized measures within a decentralized environment. Three questions guided this inquiry:

1) To what extent are the dimensions of emerging supervisory practices reflected in a decentralized context ?
2) How do central office supervisors characterize their role in exemplary school districts?
3) How do central office supervisors contribute to student success?

This study was completed following a descriptive survey approach. It used both quantitative and qualitative guidelines to construct a survey questionnaire. Descriptive survey studies "are a halfway house on the qualitative-quantitative continuum" (Krathwohl, 1993, p. 360), and are appropriate when the intent is to collect important information regarding a specific group of individuals (Krathwohl, 1993). According to Leedy, "the results of a survey are no more trustworthy than the quality of the population or the representativeness of the sample" (1974, p. 92). Similarly, Krathwohl affirms that one of the main characteristics of survey research is the "care with which the sample is chosen so that an inference can be made to the target population" (1993, 361).

The purpose of this study called for the development of a survey instrument. The instrument was organized to gather both descriptive quantitative and qualitative data. The survey instrument used was based on the 12 dimensions of emerging supervisory practices as conceptualized by Pajak (1992) with a focus on the enactment of the dimensions consistent with a decentralized approach. It included three main sections: First, the demographic section required participants to provide information relative to the type of

school district, and size of student population . It further requested information about their gender, position, highest degree, and professional certification. Second, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the 12 dimensions of supervisory practice including the specific statements reflecting a decentralized practice. These dimensions were: 1) Communication, 2) instructional program, 3) motivating and organizing, 4) curriculum, 5) service to teachers, 6) community relations, 7) staff development, 8) planning and change, 9) observations and conferences, 10) problem solving and decision-making, 11) personal development, and 12) research and program evaluation. Participants were asked to check the extent to which they agreed that each statement was reflected in practice within a decentralized context. Furthermore, following Thurstone's equal-appearing interval scale (Thurstone as cited in Miller, 1991), a four-point scale was used to ask respondents to mark their level of agreement as follows: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Third, the open-ended questions section required participants to respond using their own words about their self-reported roles and the strategies they used in contributing to the school district success as measured by the state accountability system. The intent was to "enable the researcher to understand and capture points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior categories" (Patton, 1990, p. 24).

Participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000). The intent was to have homogeneous sampling based on specific criteria. These criteria included: 1) School district was rated as Exemplary by the Texas Education Agency list of districts during the 2000-2001 academic year, 2) District

followed state policy in embracing a decentralized approach, and 3) District was recognized as high performing/high poverty district. Thus, the initial sample consisted of 168 exemplary schools districts chosen from the 2001 accountability rating system for Texas within a decentralized context. This system classifies school districts and schools into four categories: exemplary, recognized, academically acceptable, and academically unacceptable (TEA, 2001).

In a school district recognized as "Exemplary" at least 90% of "all students" and students in each subgroup meet the minimum requirements and pass each section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test (Texas Education Agency-TEA, 2001). A list of exemplary school districts for the academic year of 2000-2001 was generated using the academic excellence indicators from TEA. The survey questionnaire and a letter were mailed to the superintendents. A request was made to ask a central office staff member responsible for the curriculum and supervision function in the district to complete it and mail it back using a postage--paid and self--addressed envelope. From the 168 districts, a total of 104 questionnaires were returned. However, only 59 questionnaires were complete and useable for this study, thus yielding a 57% return.

Descriptive research involves the collection and analysis of data in order to "develop a precise description of the sample's behavior or personal characteristics" (Gall & Borg, 1990, 173). Therefore, data analysis was completed using the SPSS statistical package for the social sciences (Borg & Gall, 1989). While the demographic data was computed by using frequencies and percentages, the supervisory dimensions section of the survey was analyzed by computing overall means. Therefore, data analysis consisted

of coding the 48 items under each dimension of the 12 dimensions of emerging supervisory practices with strongly agree=4, agree=3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1. The overall means of each dimension was then used to rank order them. Furthermore, the open-ended questions section of the survey was analyzed following qualitative guidelines. Specifically, responses in this section were analyzed and synthesized using a content analysis approach (Krippendorff, 1980) and seeking patterns to accommodate a variety of perspectives (disciplinary and philosophical) on the nature of the central office supervisor role (Merriam, 1988).

Findings of the Study

The findings are presented according to the research questions guiding the study, following a description of the sample based on respondents self-reported perceptions. The total number of respondents were 59. From these, 45 (76%) reported being located in rural area, 8 (14%) in urban areas, and 6 (10%) in suburban areas. Student population in the participating school districts ranged from 299 to 24,999. More than fifty percent of the respondents were male (61%) and less than fifty percent were female (39%). Most of the participants (58%) identified themselves as superintendent, and the remaining (42%) identified themselves as central office supervisor. Those self-identified as central office supervisors (25)were placed in various positions described in Table # 1. The curriculum director role was self-reported by almost half of the participants (48%).

Table # 1

Central Office Supervisors' Positions

Position Title	Number	Percentage
Curriculum Director	11	48.0
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum	5	22.0
Director of Elementary Education	4	17.0
Director of Special Programs	3	13.0
Director of Instructional Services	1	4.0
Director of Secondary Education	1	4.0

In terms of the highest academic degree held, findings indicate that most of the study participants (83%) reported holding a master's degree, while few reported holding a doctoral degree (8%), bachelor's degree (5%) and a specialist diploma (3%). Most of the participants also (66%) indicated that they had teacher, principal and superintendent certification and only 11 participants (19%) indicated that they had a supervisor certificate. Table # 2 illustrates the different professional certification of the participants.

Table #2

Participants' Professional Certification

Type of Certification	Number	Percentage
Superintendent	36	61.0
Principal	46	78.0
Teacher	45	76.0
Supervisor	11	19.0

Note: Total exceeds 100% because participants reported more than one certificate

Emerging Supervisory Practices

Findings indicate that there is a high level of agreement regarding the dimensions of emerging supervisory practices as reflected in current practice. However, the actual degree of agreement varies. For instance, participants strongly agree (Overall Mean of Agreement-OMA=3.66) that communication is carried out according to Pajak's notion of emerging supervisory practices. Findings also suggest that participants agree that planning and change (OMA=3.42), instructional program (OMA=3.40), motivating and organizing (OMA=3.37), service to teachers (OMA=3.35), problem solving and decision-making (OMA=3.33), research and program evaluation (OMA=3.25), personal development (OMA=3.23), community relations (OMA=3.22), staff development (OMA=3.21), and curriculum (OMA=3.17) are carried out in current practice as suggested by the emerging supervisory practices. However, findings indicate that the level of agreement regarding observations and conferences is slightly lower than the others (OMA=2.99). These 12 dimensions of supervisory practice were then rank ordered according to the overall mean of agreement and the results suggest that the top three dimensions are communication, planning and change and instructional program. On the other hand, the three last ones are observations and conferences, curriculum, and staff development. Table # 3 contains all dimensions in rank order.

Table # 3
Emerging Supervisory Practices

Dimensions	Mean	Rank
Communication	3.66	1
Planning and change	3.42	2
Instructional program	3.40	3
Motivating and organizing	3.37	4
Service to teachers	3.37	5
Problem solving & decision-making	3.33	6
Research & program evaluation	3.25	7
Personal development	3.23	8
Community relations	3.22	9
Staff development	3.21	10
Curriculum	3.17	11
Observation & conferences	2.99	12

Findings relative to how central office supervisors characterize their role are based on the written verbatim of the participants. Their responses were analyzed and coded in order to address the question about the role of central office supervisors.

Characterization of the role of the central office supervisor

A total of four roles emerged from the participants written responses. These included curriculum planner, facilitator, [illegible], staff developer, and resource provider. The most frequent characterization of the role of the central office supervisor was that of "facilitator" in providing ideas, support and encouragement. As a participant conveyed: "I trust and empower principals to be the best judges of their school, teachers and programs. I provide support, resources and suggestions." Another one said, "as a facilitator, I assist with setting-up 'the reading nights' and share ideas from other districts. Also, I allow teachers to experiment and let them know that they could fail and

it would be ok. We would just learn from our mistakes." A third one commented, "I share personal ideas to promote growth and solicit ideas from staff to promote change." Another one said "I help teachers to make the instructional connections between the TAAS and TAKS tests."

According to other respondents, the central office supervisor may also be characterized as curriculum planner. As a participant said, "In a small district like ours, I am all of the central office personnel when it comes to curriculum. I implement the plan, sell it to the teachers and I have monitored it for four years now." Another one stated, "I developed and implemented curriculum alignment, scope and sequence; and training for all teachers and aids in the district."

Others characterize the role of the central office supervisor as staff developer. A participant explained this role as follows: " I prepared and gathered the information. I made the information "user-friendly" for teacher use; and I led the staff development meeting." Another one added: "I coordinate technology instruction and staff development." A third one commented, " I provided model teaching to writing classes; helped teachers set grade level goals and benchmarks; set up staff development and conducted staff development on writing strategies."

Resource provider emerged as another characterization of the role of the central office supervisor. As resource provider the supervisor selects and identifies resources that are made available to teachers. As a participant explained, "I help to find funds, approve, encourage, and follow-up." Another one said, "I secured a grant for technology."

Table # 4 offers a quantitative account of the different roles that emerged from the data.

Table # 4
The Role of the Central Office Supervisor

Characterization	Frequency	Percentage
Facilitator	26	44.00
Staff Developer	17	29.00
Curriculum Planner	9	15.00
Resource Provider	7	12.00

Contributions of Central Office Supervisors

Data revealed that central office supervisors contribute to the achievement of student success by engaging in a wide range of actions aimed at assisting schools and teachers. The top three ones included conducting staff development centered in campus specific needs, involving stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents, other school personnel and other community members), and integrating technology. Other contributions include assessing needs and progress, aligning curriculum, planning events, and other activities, purchasing materials, integrating technology, scheduling and visiting schools, organizing teams of teachers, modeling teaching, assisting with reading programs, selecting personnel, and reviewing and interpreting research. Table # 5 presents all these actions.

Table # 5
Contributions of Central Office Supervisors

Actions	Frequency	Percentage
Conducting staff development	26	44.0
Involving stakeholders	22	37.0
Integrating technology	15	25.0
Assessing needs and progress	12	20.0
Aligning curriculum	12	20.0
Visiting schools	9	15.0
Planning events & activities	8	14.0
Purchasing materials	6	10.0
Organizing teams of teachers	3	5.0
Modeling teaching	3	5.0
Assisting with reading programs	3	5.0
Selecting personnel	1	2.0
Reviewing and interpreting research	1	2.0

Note: Total exceeds 100% because participants listed more than one action.

Discussion

Accountability calls in education have generated new ways of organizing schools in order to better serve all students. For instance schools districts have embraced a decentralized approach in order to promote school-based decision making as an avenue to directly address the needs of students. This in turn has promoted a different perspective related to supervisory practice. According to Pajak (1992), supervisory practices could be enacted in a different way within a more decentralized context, creating additional and different roles and responsibilities not only for campus but also for the central office personnel. Previous studies have focused on how supervisory practices take place in schools and the roles central office supervisors perform, however, limited research

addressed the resulting nature of supervisory practice and the redefined roles of supervisors in successful school districts within a decentralized context.

Focusing on the perceptions of central office supervisors, this study sought to determine the level of agreement regarding dimensions of emerging supervisory practices. These dimensions were initially defined by Pajak (1989) and later redefined (Pajak, 1992) to reflect changes dictated by decentralization undertakings. An attempt was also made to identify the role central office supervisors perform and the contributions they make to enhance student academic success in Exemplary school districts embracing a decentralized paradigm.

This study was completed following descriptive research guidelines to create a survey instrument. The instrument was structured to gather both descriptive quantitative and qualitative data. The survey instrument was based on the 12 dimensions of emerging supervisory practices as redefined in light of decentralization endeavors (Pajak, 1992). It contained demographic information, specific statements reflecting the 12 dimensions as enacted within a decentralized paradigm, and open-ended questions to identify the roles of central office supervisors and how they contributed to student success as measured by the state accountability system. An effort was made to capture the points of view of the participants without determining those points of view in advance (Patton, 1990).

Participants of this study were selected using purposive sampling (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Thus, only those school districts that met the established criteria (Exemplary rating, decentralized district, serving high poverty schools) were contacted and mailed the questionnaire. Data analysis was completed using descriptive measures

such as frequencies, percentages and means. In addition, qualitative guidelines were used to code and sort responses to the open-ended questions.

The total sample included 58 participants. From these, 36 were male and 23 were female. More than half of the participants (36) identified themselves as superintendent, and only 22 identified themselves as central office supervisor. Those self-identified as central office supervisors were placed in various positions. The highest degree that the majority of the participants reported holding was a Master's Degree, only a few reported holding a Doctorate degree. Most of the participants also had teacher, principal and superintendent certification, and a few also had supervisor certification. This finding reflects Texas current professional certification policies in that educators may hold three professional certificates. These include teacher, principal and superintendent (State Board for Educator Certification, 1999). Consequently those interested in a central office position might have either principal or superintendent certification only.

A high level of agreement regarding the dimensions of emerging supervisory practices as reflected in decentralized context exists. This is congruent with previous studies that report that "all 12 dimensions were viewed by district-level supervisors as important" (Smith as cited by Pajak, 1998, p. 677). However, the highest level of agreement was found for communication, planning and change, and instructional program. This finding confirms Smith's (1990) report that when the dimensions of supervisory practice are ranked "as it should be" communication, and planning and change are the two highest ranked dimensions. It also reinforces Pajak's (1989) initial study, which reported that practitioners agree that communication is the most important

dimension. On the other hand the lowest level of agreement was found regarding observations and conferences.

It was also found that there are four characterizations of the role of the central office supervisor. These include facilitator, curriculum planner, staff developer, and resource provider. Most of the respondents characterize their role as that of "facilitator." This finding reflects recent innovative organization of central office personnel, and as Harris affirms, "supervisors as facilitators of both individual and group actions for improving instruction suggest others skills often reflected in the literature" (1998, p. 8). Similarly, Carter (2002) found that a decentralized school district re-framed its structure to incorporate a new team of instructional staff known as "Learning Facilitators." According to Carter, "the role of the Learning Facilitator was viewed as a critical support relationship to the campus principal in delivering an effective curriculum--not just supporting the curriculum but providing actual strategies to improve performance." (2002, p. 166). It was also reported that these facilitators tend to have a range of responsibilities. "The Learning Facilitators all take different roles and responsibilities based on the needs of the teachers and their kids. They are asked to be a facilitator, a generalist, even though at times they have very specific assignments but the intent is that anybody can contact them about anything and they will facilitate getting the assistance they need" (Carter, 2002, p. 167).

The roles of curriculum planner, staff developer and resource provider are consistent with what other studies (Harris, 1998: Glathorn, 1998) report as common. These more traditional roles suggest that central office supervisors are in a position to

exert influential support by guiding curriculum alignment efforts, by conducting staff development that directly addresses campus and student needs. These roles also confirm Wimpelberg's (1987) assertion that central office supervisors support the development of principals and teachers alike. Moreover, the characterization of the central office supervisor as a resource provider suggests that they have decisional ability to do both searching for additional resources and allocating resources (Sullivan, 1982).

Findings also indicate that central office supervisors' major contributions to the academic success of students include conducting staff development centered in campus specific needs, involving all stakeholders, and integrating technology. Other contributions relate to assessing needs and progress of students using achievement data, aligning curriculum, planning events, and other activities, purchasing materials, integrating technology, scheduling and visiting schools, organizing teams of teachers, modeling teaching, assisting with reading programs, selecting personnel, and reviewing and interpreting research. Most of these actions are consistent with the emerging supervisory practices re-conceptualized by Pajak (1992) as well. However, integrating and coordinating technology reflects recent developments in instruction and supervisory practice. As Harris affirms, "new technologies, such as video conferencing and computer networking, are bringing disparate agencies and remote individuals into the supervisory process" (1998, p. 11).

This study suggests that emerging supervisory practices indeed are reflected in a decentralized context. It also indicates that the central office supervisor role is expanding to include not only traditional roles but also new ones as it is the case with the role of

facilitator, and that their contributions are also expanding to include the integration of technology at both levels, classroom and supervision. However, further inquiry could determine the new skills and competencies needed by central office supervisors as their roles expand. For instance, Harris suggests, "theory, practice and research in the field of school supervision will need to focus more on relationships, processes and structural outcomes...." (1989, p. 27). Therefore, additional studies may focus on the expanded roles of central office supervisors within other school districts, not only those located in rural areas but also those located in urban and suburban areas. Similarly, as school districts embrace new structures and introduce innovations, further exploring the role of the central office supervisor becomes imperative. Such exploration may not only expand the field of supervision knowledge but it may also inform preparation institutions that aim at equipping aspiring district supervisors with the understandings, skills and dispositions needed to respond to the ever changing school environments and to promote excellence and equity in all schools.

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