A Summary of the Current Landscape of Superintendent Evaluation Practices and Preferences

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Increasing emphasis on evidence-based evaluation processes in districts across the United States challenges school board directors to call into question their current evaluation practices of superintendents. Existing methods tend to be inconsistent and not aligned to specific criteria (Hendricks, 2013). This study investigates the current landscape of superintendent evaluation across a variety of districts in Washington State and to determine any differences between current practices and superintendent preference. Survey data were collected from 57 superintendents. Descriptive statistics and paired samples t-tests were used to analyze results. The findings from this research confirmed that current practices for evaluation of superintendents are inconsistent across the state and often subjective. Typically, feedback is moderately helpful and not supported with measurable data. In many cases, there was a statistically significant difference between evaluation practice and superintendent preference.

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With the increased implementation of a standards-based approach to evaluation using instructional frameworks for teachers and principals, many districts and states are seeking out methods for replicating this type of practice with superintendents (Lashway, Cohn, Gore, and Sharratt, 2013). Results of research over the past two decades reveal that the evaluation of superintendents has been inconsistent both in practice and in what and how they are being evaluated (Eadie, 2008). Furthermore, superintendents have indicated a lack of satisfaction with current evaluation practices (Mayo, and McCartney, 2004). There is limited professional learning support for school board members on how to successfully implement a cycle of evaluation, both summative and formative that reflects the dynamic, multi-faceted and increasingly political role of the superintendent (Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). This political and social pressure is often ubiquitous and may affect the relationships between the board members and superintendent (Moody, 2011). The superintendent must learn how to decipher this landscape to be successful both with the greater community as well as with the respective board members (Tekniepe, 2015). The evaluation process can be viewed as a support mechanism for nurturing relationships and fostering improvement through articulating clear expectations and goals for improvement (Vranish, 2011).

The interplay of a school board of directors as a governing body and evaluator of the superintendent brings with it unique challenges. Even if states or districts have a policy or contractual language that outlines the evaluation method for the superintendent, the implementation of the evaluation process can be inconsistent (Eadie, 2008). School board members maintain a level of governance that remains primarily outside of the daily operations of a district. Board members often lack the understanding of how to utilize a system for evaluation in a sustainable way (Hendricks, 2013; Vranish, 2011). This creates a reliance on the superintendent to train her/his board on how to evaluate in a productive and effective way (Henrikson, 2018). It is also difficult to create a comprehensive sense of "voice" or utilize an evidence-based process when typically only the superintendent offers the evidence of fulfilling his/her duties as the district leader. Candoli, Cullen, and Stuffelbeam (1997) found that current superintendent evaluation systems are not serving the educational community sufficiently.

One of the most indispensable duties of the school board is to effectively evaluate the superintendent to ensure he/she is serving his/her constituents effectively (Washington State School Directors Association, [WSSDA] 2012). Unlike that of most states where the evaluation of teachers and principals is prescribed, superintendents typically can provide input into the details of their evaluation process. It is critical to better understand what superintendents prefer to be included in their evaluation cycle to promote a positive, learner-centered process that balances accountability for their role as district leader with opportunities to speak into their own professional learning needs and goals (Hendricks, 2013). The evaluation ought to inform next steps and be used within a cycle of ongoing improvement as well as used as a summative tool. Yet, current practices leave many superintendents dissatisfied even when there is a prescribed evaluation process in place. Because the superintendent contract and evaluation are negotiated solely between the board and the superintendent there is tremendous potential for improvement of this process and gaining a greater understanding through school board and superintendent dialogue (Vransih, 2011). School board members and superintendents alike need to better understand the power and potential for district improvement through utilizing a sound evaluation process. These improvements cannot happen without input from the both parties.

With the shift towards increasing the use of a standards-based approach to superintendent evaluation much like that of principals and teachers, the researcher wondered whether there has been a shift in superintendent satisfaction of their evaluation processes over the past decade. This current study seeks to, in a way, replicate a study by C. Russell Mayo and Gary McCartney (2004) which explored the satisfaction of superintendents regarding their process for evaluation. This study provides current information in three areas: 1) effective methods for superintendent performance evaluation that will inform school boards, superintendents and other policy-makers, 2) collective perspective from superintendents about current practice and their preferences for their performance evaluation processes within Washington State, and 3) future researchers on effective evaluation practices.

Research Question 1: What is the current landscape of superintendent evaluation processes in Washington State?

Research Question 2: In what cases are practice statistically different than preference?

Research Question 3: What are implications for improving evaluation practices given this current landscape?

To address these questions, the researcher collected survey data from 57 superintendents across Washington State. The questions were the same as in the original survey which were generated based on superintendent feedback, review of literature and the Educational Research Service (ERS) study (Robinson & Bickers, 1990), The Study of the American Superintendency 2000 (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Mayo & McCartney, 2004).

Theoretical Perspective

Evaluation is imbued into all aspects of society to consider how to improve systems, structures and processes (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). Tyler (1942), a leading theorist and researcher on evaluation theory, described one of the primary purposes of evaluation is to assess the effectiveness of an educational organization in order to determine whether improvements are necessary and in order to make wise decisions by the stakeholders. Theories and practices of evaluation has its origins in the late 1960's when the federal government wanted to determine the effectiveness of a growing number of human service programs (Madaus, Stufflebeam, & Scriven, 1983). Evaluation theory stems from two primary origins of thought: social inquiry and the need for a foundation of accountability (Alkin & Christie, 2004). From these two origins of thought, Alkin and Christie (2004) described evaluation theory as having three main branches: "Use," "Methods," and "Valuing," where the use of data within the valuing branch may be the most critical component of evaluation theory and the main role of an evaluator (p. 13). Evaluation theory is broadly defined with each of the three branches as outlined by Madaus et al. (1983). In a literature review, Johnson, Greenseid, Toal, King, Lawrenz, and Volkov (2009) found that two critical components of effective evaluation include stakeholder involvement and evaluator competence. They also found that "engagement, interaction and communication between the evaluator and client is critical to the meaningful use of evaluation" (p. 389). Broadly speaking, Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014) define evaluation as "determining whether objectives have been achieved" (p. 6). The authors expand this definition to articulate key steps involved in carrying out a sound evaluation, utilizing descriptive and judgmental information, and consider the audience and stakeholders of the evaluation as part of the process.

The Changing Role of the Superintendent

This section begins with a brief review of the changing role of the superintendent in recent decades, relative to evaluation processes, then continues with the role of the board as evaluators. This includes a summary of historical evaluation practices through the present time. This section concludes with the challenges associated with current evaluation practices.

In the early 1800's, states recognized a need to take on the responsibility of education and needed help in leading schools (Newsom, 1932; Stufflebeam, 1994). The first superintendents were representatives for schools within entire states, whose primary goals were to plan common school systems, report on management of public funds, and provide information to the state regarding school-related issues. Once there was recognition that districts within a given state had disparate needs and contextual differences, including issues of inequity, there was a push to advocate for the common school model. This in turn gave local control to schools to hire superintendents to become district representatives (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). Later, in many states, regional or county-based superintendents were also hired to act as liaisons between district and state entities. These county superintendents were looked to for ensuring state requirements were being communicated to districts and implemented in a consistent manner (Newsom, 1932). To date, only about three-fifths of all states have county superintendents (Education Commission of the States, 2018) which in many cases would also add to the responsibilities of the district superintendent.

Compared to what the position of the superintendent is now, often thought of as the Chief Executive Officer of a school district, this role has seen many drastic changes since its inception (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). By the end of the 19th century, the role of the district superintendent as well as the school board evolved drastically. Early on, during the late 1800's to early 1900's the school board was in charge of making most administrative and policy decisions while the superintendent was charged with training teachers and leaders, advising the school board, reforming schools and completing administrative paperwork and other duties (Kowalski, 2005; Stufflebeam, 1994). With the onset of the industrialized society in the early 20th century, there began a concern with the efficiency of school districts and as such, shifted the role of the superintendent to one of a manager. The main duties during this time included managing budgetary, personnel, facilities and other operations throughout the district (Kowalksi, 2011). During the mid-1900's, scholars began to recognize the importance that politics plays in the role and duties of the superintendent (Bjork & Lindle, 2001). This, coupled with the impact that the Great Depression had on public schools, is also when the perception of the superintendent as democratic leader began to take root (Bjork, 2008; Kowalski, 2005). Superintendents were faced with a new political pressure to compete for state funding with other state agencies and needed to learn how to be a positive force not only within the school district, but as an advocate within their respective communities. This was short lived, however and nearing the second half of the 20th century, superintendents were considered essential for managing a district's operations and should be focused not on scholarly or idealistic activities, but rather the day-to-day management of a district's operations. The end of the 20th century saw a slight adaptation to this, recognizing once again the importance that democratic leadership plays in the superintendent's role, specifically regarding public relations. Kowalski (1991) illustrated this when he emphasized the communication responsibilities between the school district and community for support of school initiatives.

With an emphasis on the superintendent role as "communicator," Kowalski, (2005) acknowledged the politicized nature of the position and brought attention to the need for superintendents to be cognizant of political pressures they may encounter. Moffett (2011) described the superintendent as one who needs to be an "instructional leader, fiscal guru and diplomatic human resources professional" (p. 2). Growing attention to academic accountability through high stakes assessments, pressure for data-driven results, and improved teacher evaluation systems created an even more complex set of responsibilities for the superintendent (Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2014). Given this increasing level of accountability with often times funding shortfalls, superintendents needed to become expert communicators to the educators within their district, their community and serve as the primary source of information to their boards (Bjork et al., 2014). Many states and certification standards recognize the role of superintendent as communicator and include effective communication as a competency (Kowalski, 2005). This role of superintendent as communicator is still present to date. However, an issue with conceiving the superintendent as an effective communicator as part of his/her role is that it is difficult to measure this skill given the numerous audiences the superintendent addresses (Kowalski, 2005). Perhaps the most high-stake audience is the school board. While the trends of the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent across the United States is broadly stated, it is important to recognize that there are differences across and between states and in urban versus rural landscapes in how this role has transformed over time.

Negotiating the external pressures relative to school district issues is inherent to the work of the superintendent and school board. Ongoing challenges between two groups are also "both constant and evolving" (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011, p. 160). The superintendent evaluation process can be used to recognize the dynamic and complicated nature of this position within its specific context while at the same time providing support, feedback and opportunities for continued professional growth. Ideally, the evaluation process could be used as a means for strengthening the relationship between the board and superintendent through clear communication and long-term vision (National School Board Association [NSBA], 2014).

History of School Board Evaluation Practices

As the superintendent position continued to evolve, there was also an attempt to define the roles and responsibilities and to quantify and measure the effectiveness through superintendent evaluations. In 1980, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and National School Boards Association (NSBA) jointly produced a set of processes to evaluate the superintendent (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). There was limited information on the superintendent evaluation practices (Hoyle & Skrla, 1999) during the first two decades of the formalization of the process. In fact, in the 1990's multiple studies showed that while 90% of superintendents were evaluated, there was little to no explicit knowledge of the criteria used to evaluate the superintendent (DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). In 1999, Candoli, Cullen and Stufflebeam synthesized the purpose and characteristics of the superintendent evaluation process. They wrote,

> Among the commonly stated evaluation purposes are to clarify superintendent and board roles, inform the superintendent of the board's expectations, assess performance with standards, identify areas needing improvement, improve educational performance, improve superintendent/board communication and relations, improve planning, aid in the superintendent's professional development, inform personnel decisions, assure

accountability, and fulfill legal requirements. These important purposes clearly require pertinent and dependable performance evaluations. (p. 4)

Since the development of effective evaluation practices tended to be inconsistent and inadequate, superintendents were typically evaluated through a credentialing process (Candoli et al., 1997). If superintendents obtained the needed credentials through the state's certification process, they were deemed acceptable. This turned out to be flawed due to the differential minimum certification requirements across states and even districts. In response to this, AASA further developed a set of standards for superintendents in 1994, which specifically outlined the requirements. This included three sets of competencies that encompass preparation, certification and professional development. These were derived from the earlier evaluation standards produced from AASA that fit under their corresponding AASA Professional Standards (Candoli, et al., 1997; DiPaola & Stronge, 2003). In the 1990's with the rapidly increasing emphasis on academic achievement, the nature of the evaluation changed to reflect the growing accountability of ensuring increasing levels of student success. According to Glass, Bjork and Brunner (2000), this move towards greater accountability also shifted the emphasis of evaluation to four main areas: educational leader, political leader, managerial leader, and leader of reform (p. 63). While these four roles have remained relatively consistent over the past 15 years, little has changed in regards to creating a reliable and consistent system for evaluation that aligns closely to these responsibilities (Dawson & Quinn, 2010).

Over the past decade, there has been an emphasis on creating a more standards-based approach towards superintendent evaluation that includes the integration of the administrator's job description, leadership standards and district goals. Often this is organized through utilizing a framework that reflects the dynamic nature of the position (WSSDA, 2012). National and state school board associations recommend utilizing a formative process of evaluation rather than the more traditional summative approach. The heart of this formative process includes the superintendent and her/his board regularly reviewing goals and documenting evidence of progress towards goals (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). Of course, the development and adoption of evaluation practices do vary from state to state. Whether there are adopted practices either statewide or at the local level, issues still exist in regards to the extent that evaluation process is aligned to the needs of the superintendent to promote his/her further growth, and how equipped is the school board to utilize the process in a meaningful way for both the superintendent and to meet district goals. Adopting and implementing an evaluation process is simply the first step. Ensuring this process is helpful in providing ongoing communication, feedback and direction for the superintendent while also recognizing the unique context of the district ought to be investigated.

Current Evaluation Challenges

With the ongoing refinement of the superintendent evaluation process, it is imperative to discuss what a synthesis of research has formulated as the purpose of the evaluation process. Candoli et al. (1997), conducted a review of literature that identified the main purposes of the superintendent performance evaluation that was included in board policy. These purposes are as follows:

- improve educational performance
- improve communication between the board and the superintendent
- clarify the roles of the superintendent and the board members
- improve board/superintendent relations

- inform the superintendent of the board's expectations
- improve planning
- aid in the professional development of the superintendent
- use as a basis for personnel decisions
- use as an accountability mechanism
- to fulfill legal requirements (pp 47-50).

While this list provides an overview of the general purpose of evaluation, there can be preconceptions that exist among and between states' district board of directors regarding the purpose of evaluation. Some of these differences could be due to the need for alignment of job responsibilities and perceived role of the superintendent within a given context. As noted in a report by the Council of Chief State School Officers, while there may be inconsistency among job descriptions and expectations, specific leadership development needs are unique to the individual and context of the district (CCSSO, 2013). This inconsistency of understanding the purpose of evaluation and resulting practices has led to often arbitrary goal-setting and vague guidelines for performance. Relational issues tend to determine the tenure of a superintendent more than the performance itself. As Hoyle and Skyrla (1999, p. 405) write,

> The annual evaluation of the superintendent by the school board can be a process characterized by mutual respect that emphasizes improvement of the leadership performance of the superintendent or, conversely, it can be an intensely stressful process that fosters the worst forms of political game playing.

The evaluation process can be a means for ongoing improvement. Yet, there is an inconsistent set of criteria and expectations for determining whether a superintendent is performing satisfactorily (DiPaola, 2010). Given the proliferation of information that an effective evaluation system could be built upon, DiPaola (2010) stated that there is often a lack of clearly defined job expectations and performance goals developed between the superintendent and her/his respective board. A report produced by AASA (2014) further concluded that there is still a lack of a clear process with objective measures for evaluation. This report suggested that there exists a challenge for a school board to remain objective during the evaluation process due to personality and political differences. Furthermore, the very structure of the evaluation process encourages a stance of proving one's ability to meet the goals set forth rather than utilizing a process of ongoing improvement (Henrikson, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The review of literature on existing challenges to the superintendent evaluation practices further confirms earlier findings. A study conducted by Glass (2007) found that only slightly above 50% of the superintendents surveyed stated that they were evaluated on mutually agreed upon criteria and about one-quarter of the time, the board alone determined the criteria. Furthermore, Glass (2007) found that even with a set of criteria, the board adhered to it only about half of the time. Vranish (2011) offered additional insight into the challenge of creating an evaluation system where the evaluators have limited understanding of the daily activities of the superintendent and often evaluate using hearsay and/or the evidence brought forth only by the superintendent without an authentic and comprehensive board understanding of the nature of their performance. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) reported that most superintendents were not being evaluated based on their job descriptions but rather their relationships between the board members. In fact, the criteria being

used may not even match the unique context of the district or superintendent needs (Glass et al., 2000).

The inability of a superintendent to communicate effectively with the school board leads to mistrust and seemingly negative perspectives of agendas and claims of lack of transparency (Hoyle & Skrla, 2000). Interpersonal relationships between the board and the superintendent are also a factor in determining the tenure of a superintendent and/or receiving a positive evaluation. Grissom and Anderson (2012) found that while the norm is a positive relationship between the board and the superintendent, one of the reasons why superintendents decide to seek employment elsewhere is often times the interpersonal relationships that exist at the board level. Hoyle and Skrla (2000) echoed this finding, explaining that the prevalent reasons board members give as to why they choose to not renew a superintendent contract is based not in lack of ability to perform the job, but rather differences in opinion of the direction that the district ought to be heading.

Over the past decade there has been a shift towards a more performance and evidence-based evaluation (Lashway et al., 2013). This process includes a formative cycle that utilizes a framework for documenting and tracking progress of goals set forth by the superintendent. A shift is taking place that moves the superintendent from having to prove that she/he has met the evaluation goals to one that encourages a stance of improvement has been emphasized (WSSDA, 2012). This shift highlights the importance of holding the superintendent accountable for meeting his/her goals, while at the same time recognizing the need for ongoing improvement and professional development. However, even if school boards are adopting a standards-based, cyclical process, this will not automatically improve the effectiveness of the experience. If the goal is to measure the superintendent's effectiveness against pre-defined criteria and provide measurable outcomes and next steps for improvement, simply adopting a framework or assessment tool will not accomplish this in and of itself. Transformational shifts in how the superintendent evaluation process is conducted takes professional development by both the board and the superintendent and constant reflection and refinement of the procedures in place. A change in mindset is necessary to enable all participants to understand the implicit interpersonal relationships at play as well as see the larger purpose to improve the general satisfaction of the evaluation process.

These challenges to the evaluation process have been traced back several decades and remain startlingly similar compared to contemporary practices. Mayo and McCartney (2004) sought to determine the satisfaction of current evaluation practices of 1,125 superintendents across the United States. The authors had three objectives: 1) to provide current information on superintendent performance evaluation, 2) to provide a collective perspective from superintendents on their preferences for evaluation practices, and 3) provide future researchers with additional information regarding the progression of the superintendent evaluation process (p. 21). Mayo and McCartney (2004) listed several findings relative to contemporary evaluation methods. Over 90% of the superintendents were evaluated at least annually, about 20% preferred semi-annual evaluations. They also found that even with the "results-based" movement that came with the onset of the 21st century, little changed with the evaluation practices to reflect this. Only 61.3% of boards and superintendents jointly decided on evaluation criteria. Perhaps one of the most notable and relevant findings of the study as it pertains to the current review of literature is that only 16.9% of suggestions for improvement were deemed "very helpful" (p. 26). Considering the context of both the district and the superintendent when determining the criteria for evaluation is extremely important, yet only 26.2% of the superintendents reported that their context was even considered. Recognizing the political nature of the superintendent role as integral to sustaining positive interpersonal relationships, only 56.9% of superintendents reported that their evaluations were

objective. Given a dynamic landscape of issues the board and superintendent face on a regular basis, having an objective evaluation is critical to sustaining a sound and proactive method of communication.

Often the lack of experience of the board in regard to evaluation is a hindrance to the process. The superintendent becomes the one to train and equip the board with how to be evaluated. Relative to this, Mayo and McCartney (2004) found that 71.3% of superintendents claimed that less than half of their board had the knowledge and training to conduct the evaluation effectively.

With an emphasis on an evidence-based process for evaluation across K-12 educators (including principals), it is interesting to also note the perspectives of the superintendents who desire this approach as part of their evaluation process. Only 19% of the superintendents in the original study by Mayo and McCartney (2004) had a result- or evidence-based evaluation. In their study, 88% of the superintendents desired evidence to be included as compared to the practice of evaluating based on personality traits. While the study conducted by Mayo and McCartney was published in 2004, surprisingly similar issues remain in contemporary evaluation practices. Fortunately, there is flexibility in how school boards and superintendents can negotiate the evaluation process even when there is policy in place. In order to further this conversation of improvement in growth-oriented evaluation practices, it is critical to further investigate how superintendents prefer to be evaluated that will both promote their own professional growth and meet district goals.

Method

This current study had two major purposes: 1) to further investigate the present-day landscape of the nature of school board evaluation in Washington State and 2) to seek out cases in which the practice of superintendent evaluation is significantly different than the preferred methods. The following subsections describe the instruments, sample, data collection method and analysis. The survey and analysis used will reflect a similar approach to the former research (Mayo & McCarthey, 2004), but also seek to continue the conversation in regards to implications for how the results reflect current challenges to superintendent evaluation.

Research Question 1: What is the current landscape of superintendent evaluation processes in Washington State?

Research Question 2: In what cases are practice statistically different than preference?

Research Question 3: What are implications for improving evaluation practices given this current landscape?

Instrument

The survey items were replicated from the original study with permission from the authors and according to Mayo and McCartney (2004), were originally derived from previous surveys developed by Robinson and Bickers (1990) and Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000). In total, the questions developed for this survey came from discussions with practicing superintendents, a review of the literature on superintendent evaluation, the Educational Research Service Study (Robinson & Bickers, 1990) and The American Superintendency 2000 (Glass et al., 2000). One item from the original survey instrument was slightly modified: Question Two from the original survey required one response for both student achievement data and student demographic information. The researcher chose to separate these topics into two distinct questions given the

relevancy of both as separate accountability measures. Additionally, the original survey was sent out as a hard copy to superintendents. This survey utilized an online survey tool and emailed out to participants with a link to the survey. Nineteen questions appeared on the survey with requests for demographic information (gender, size of district, number of years of experience, etc). Nine questions addressed uniform effectiveness of evaluation practices; six questions sought to address the consistency of results-based practices. Most questions included two parts: the current practice (reality) and the preference of the superintendent (Mayo & McCartney 2004). The original questionnaire was also validated through field testing.

Participants

A public records request was made for the email addresses of all the superintendents in Washington State. E-mail addresses for 302 of the 303 superintendents in Washington State were used to send out an invitation to complete the survey. One superintendent did not receive the invitation due to a conflict of interest with the researcher. The instructions indicated they had about a one-month window to respond. A reminder was also sent out one week before the closing date of the survey. Of the 302 superintendents who were sent the survey, 36 of those emails were undeliverable or the superintendent would not be back within the given survey window making the total number of superintendents who received the survey email about 266. This lower number is not surprising given the survey was sent out during a time of high rates of transitions. Fifty-seven surveys were completed. This means the response rate was about 22%. A review of the survey results indicate districts of various student enrollment numbers were represented. The groupings were the same as the original study and in alignment with the AASA 2000 profile of superintendents (Mayo et. al., 2004). The four enrollment groups were (A) fewer than 300; (B) 300 to 2,999; (C) 3,000 to 24,999; and (D) 25,000 or more. Of the returns, 24.5% were from districts fewer than 3000, 46% were from districts of 300 to 2,999; 26% were from districts of 3,000 to 24,999; and 3.5% came from districts with enrollments of 25,000 or more. 79% of respondents were male and 21% were female. 89% of respondents were Caucasian, 3.5% African American, 1.7% reported as Hispanic and 5.2% reported as Other.

Results

1.

The primary purpose of this study was to develop a narrative of the current landscape of superintendent evaluation practices as well as to gain a deeper understanding of what superintendents would prefer for their evaluation process. The researcher was also interested in determining what instances was the perceived practice statistically different than preference. After analyzing the responses for each of the questions, those that appeared to have vast differences between the practice and preference were calculated using a paired samples t-test to determine if indeed there was a statistically significant difference between practice and preference. Nine of the questions appeared to have obvious differences between practice and preference. Of those nine, five were analyzed using a paired samples t-test. The reason only five out of the nine items were analyzed was due to the ability to analyze results of interval data using Likert-Scale questions as part of the paired samples t-test (Field, 2009). Other questions were not written as interval data so a paired-samples t-test was not permitted. For example, for the question "How did the board express their expectations of you at the time of your hiring?" the responses were: 3: Explicit

guidelines, 2: General Discussion or 3: Little or No Direction Given. The results of these t-tests will also be reported within the results.

The results show that while approximately 96% of the superintendents who responded to the survey have an evaluation performed at least annually, it is clear that there is not a uniform process (see Table 1). The practice of how often superintendents were evaluated was consistent with their preference. 60% of respondents were evaluated only once per year, while 30% were evaluated semi-annually. None of the superintendents were evaluated at time of contract renewal.

Communicating expectations of performance to the superintendent is a critical component of establishing the evaluation process between the board and superintendent. Only 5% of superintendents were given explicit guidelines for performance when they were hired even though 26% of them would have preferred it (see Table 2). Fifty-nine percent were given general guidance while 74% of those surveyed would have preferred to receive general guidance. Of the respondents, 36% were given no guidance when they were hired although not one of them indicated that they would have preferred no guidance. Since this difference, along with many other items within the survey appeared to have a statistically significant difference between practice and preference, the researcher was interested in confirming this observation. After the responses were analyzed, the researcher used a paired-samples t-test on items that appeared to have a statistically significant difference.

Table 1
How Often Does Your Evaluation Occur?

	Total Sample	
	Practice	Preference
Annually	60%	61.40%
Semi-Annually	29.80%	28%
At Contract Renewal	0%	1.75%
Other	7.02%	7.02%
Never	3.51%	1.75%
Total Number	57	57

Table 2
How Did the Board Express Its Expectations of You at the Time of Your Hiring?

	Practice	Preference
Explicit Guidelines	5.36%	26.32%
General Guidance Provided	58.93%	73.68%
Little or No Direction	35.71%	0
Total Number	56	57

The first question that showed a statistically significant difference between practice and preference was whether or not the board expressed its expectations of the superintendent at the time of hiring (see Tables 3 and 4). There was a statistically significant difference in the scores for current practice (m=1.69, SD=.56) and preference (m=2.26, SD=.44) responses; t(55)= -8.56, p=.000.

Table 3
Paired Samples Statistic

		Mean	N	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Practice of Board Expectations	1.69	56	.56	.07
	Preference of Board Expectations	2.26	56	.44	.06

Table 4
Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences							
			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Practice of Board Expectations-Preference of Board Expectations	-.57	.50	.06	-.70	-.43	-8.5	55	.000

The data indicated that 73% of boards and superintendents determined evaluation criteria jointly even though almost all superintendents prefer this practice (see Table 5). Currently, about 21% of school boards solely determine the criteria. Three and a half percent of superintendents indicated that there were no criteria established.

Table 5
Who Decides the Criterial for Your Evaluation?

	Practice	Preference
School Board Alone	21.43	3.51
Supt Alone	1.79	1.75
Board and Supt	73.21	94.74
Other	0	0
No Criteria Established	3.57	0
Total Number	56	57

Much of the literature review of superintendent evaluation practices reveals a dissatisfaction with the level of objectivity practiced, noting that often times personality conflicts have a large influence on the success of the superintendent's evaluation (Glass, et al., 2000; Weiss,

Templeton, Thompson, & Tremont, 2014). The data collected during this current study revealed that only 21% of all school boards were completely objective for evaluation purposes as opposed to half of all superintendents who preferred complete objectivity (see Table 6). According to the responses, 41% of school boards remained mostly objective, 30% remained somewhat objective while 7% of the evaluations were considered not at all objective. Additionally, a paired samples t-test was run to determine whether there was a significant difference between the means of practice and preference for level of objectivity exercised during the evaluation. There was a statistically significant difference in the scores for current practice (m=2.7, SD=.87) and preference (m=3.5, SD=.54) responses; t(55)= -9.5 p=.000, (see Tables 7 and 8).

One of the ongoing challenges with school board directors evaluating superintendents is the lack of training in effective evaluation practices. Typically, it is the superintendent who provides the overview and support needed to evaluate him/herself (DiPaola, 2010). When asked what percentage of school board members have the training and knowledge to evaluate objectively, 43% of the superintendents reported that only one-fourth of their respective school board members have the needed skills and knowledge to evaluate objectively (see Table 9). Twenty-one percent of superintendents indicated that more than half of their respective board members have the skills and knowledge to evaluate objectively.

Table 6
What Is Your Greatest Opinion about the Level of Objectivity Exercised with Your Evaluation?

	Practice	Preference
Objective	21.43%	49.12%
Mostly Objective	41.07%	47.37%
Somewhat Objective	30.36%	3.51%
Not at all Objective	7.14%	0.00%
Total Number	56	57

Table 7
Paired Samples Statistic

		Mean	N	Std Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Practice of level of objectivity	2.7	56	.87	.11
	Preference of level of objectivity	3.5	56	.54	.07

Table 8
Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Practice of level of objectivity-Preference of level of objectivity	-.71	.56	.07	-.86	-.56	-9.5	.55	.000

Table 9
In Your Opinion, What Percentage of Your Current Board Members Have the Training and Knowledge in Evaluation Procedures to Assess You Objectively?

	Practice	Preference
Less than 25%	43.64%	0.00%
25-49%	20.00%	1.79%
50-74%	14.55%	7.14%
75-100%	21.82%	91.07%
Total Number	55	56

When asked to rank what superintendents perceived as the top prioritized criteria for evaluation purposes, 50% indicated that it was "General Effectiveness of Performance." "Budget Development and Implementation" ranked second at 53% while "Board/Supt Relationship" ranked third at 43% (see Table 10).

Criteria for judging performance typically falls into three categories: personality traits, process skills or results (Mayo & McCartney, 2004). Superintendents chose which of the three receives the most consideration during their evaluation. The results in Table 11 show 42% of respondents indicated that "Process Skills" were most highly considered, with 21% of the respondents indicating "Personality Traits" as most important. However, when asked to indicate which of the three criteria they would like to have emphasized, 61% of respondents chose "Results" while less than 2% indicated "Personality Traits" as most important.

Table 10

Comparison of Current Practice and Preference for Total Sample based on Percentage of Participants Marking Consideration as High

	Current Practice				Preferred			
	High	Moderate	Little/None	Don't Know	High	Moderate	Little/None	Don't Know
General Effectiveness of Performance	50.94% (27)	37.74% (20)	11.32% (6)	0	79.25% (42)	18.87% (10)	1.89% (1)	0
Degree to Which Performance Obj Were Achieved	25% (13)	61.54% (32)	13.46% (7)	0	57.69% (30)	40.38% (21)	1.92% (1)	0
Leadership of Instructional Program	31.37% (16)	47.06% (24	21.57% (11)	0	64% (32)	36% (18)	0	0
Knowledge of Trends in the Field of Education	15.69% (8)	39.22% (20)	45.10% (23)	0	40% (20)	42% (21)	16% (8)	2% (1)
Student Achievement Results	13.73% (7)	54.9% (28)	31.37% (16)	0	39.22% (20)	56.86% (29)	1.96% (1)	0
Level of Agreement Between Board/Supt Priorities	31.37% (16)	37.25% (19)	29.41% (15)	1.96% (1)	52.94% (27)	41.18% (21)	5.88% (3)	0
Board/Supt Relationship	43.14% (22)	39.22% (20)	17.65% (9)	0	62% (31)	28% (14)	8% (4)	2% (1)

Staff/Supt Relationship	24% (12)	52% (26)	22% (11)	2% (1)	39.22% (20)	56.86% (29)	3.92% (2)	0
Student/Supt Relationship	3.92% (2)	35.29% (18)	54.9% (28)	5.88% (3)	19.61% (10)	52.94% (27)	21.57% (11)	5.88% (3)
Parent and Community-Supt Relationships	26% (13)	60% (30)	14% (7)	0	40% (20)	52% (26)	8% (4)	0
Personal Characteristics	25.49% (13)	60.73% (31)	9.8% (5)	3.92% (2)	29.41% (15)	56.86% (29)	9.8% (5)	3.92% (2)
Recruitment, Employment, and Supt of Personnel	27.45% (14)	45.10% (23)	27.45% (14)	0	47.06% (24)	50.98% (26)	1.96% (1)	0
Budget Development and Implementation	53.06% (26)	26.53% (13)	20.41% (10)	0	58.82% (30)	41.18% (21)	0	0
News Media Coverage	5.88% (3)	37.25% (19)	54.9% (28)	1.96% (1)	11.76% (6)	54.90% (28)	31.37% (16)	1.96% (1)

Table 11

Generally, Criteria Used for Judging Your Performance Fall into the Three Categories Listed Below. Which One of the Three Receives the Most Consideration?

	Practice	Preference
Personality Traits	21.43%	1.75%
Process Skills	42.86%	36.84%
Results	35.71%	61.40%
Number of Reponses	56	57

Discussion

The superintendent position is the only contract that is solely negotiated between her/himself and the school board of directors. What often comes with this is a negotiation, or at the very least, discussion about how the superintendent will be evaluated. This is unique and an exception to most or all other positions within the district. Educators typically do not have the opportunity to discuss their preferences for how they wish to be evaluated nor given much leeway in this process. While there may be policy adopted at the local or state level, often times it is up to the discretion of the board as to the process for evaluation and what tools, criteria and sources of information will be used. Understanding what superintendents prefer in their evaluation process is integral to their ongoing success and to support ongoing and proactive communication between the board and the superintendent.

The move towards a standards-based approach for superintendent evaluation that many boards are adopting, brings with it a need to address whether this has improved the inconsistencies and general dissatisfaction with traditional evaluation practices. In other words, is the standards-based approach meeting the needs or preferences of superintendents? Are boards even utilizing a standards-based approach or, even with this trend, do boards and superintendents remain stagnant in their evaluation practices? Given the multi-faceted and political nature of the superintendent role, it is important to seek out information on the nature of how superintendents are currently being evaluated.

The primary purpose of this study was: 1) to further investigate the current landscape of the nature of superintendent evaluation in Washington State and 2) to seek out cases in which the practice of superintendent evaluation is significantly different than the preferred methods.

Research Question 1: What is the current landscape of superintendent evaluation processes in Washington State?

Research Question 2: In what cases is practice statistically different than preference?

Research Question 3: What are implications for improving evaluation practices given this current landscape?

The only consistent standard for the evaluation practices across Washington State was that approximately 96% of all superintendents were indeed evaluated in some way and at least once per year. One other area that was somewhat consistent was how the evaluation was reported with 82% of superintendents saying they received both oral and written feedback on their performance. This was also consistent with their preference in that almost 88% preferred their feedback to be both oral and in writing. However, this is where the consistencies amongst evaluation practices end.

Only 59% of school boards expressed general expectations for the superintendent at the time of their hiring, while 36% were given little to no direction. That leaves only 5% that were given explicit guidelines or expectations of their responsibilities at the time of hiring. Additionally, only 58% of superintendents felt that the feedback for improvement was somewhat helpful with only 14% stating it was very helpful. A startling 28% of superintendents indicated that the quality of suggestions for improvement was of little to no help. In fact, there was a differing of opinion as to what the primary purpose of evaluation even was. About 36% of superintendents believed it was for periodic and systematic accountability. This was the highest category, with three other categories as a secondary purpose. These categories included: 1) Identify areas needing improvement, 2) Assess present performance, and 3) Comply with board policy were the second most common reasons. When the superintendents were asked what they perceive as top criteria for

evaluation, 50% indicated it was to determine general effectiveness of performance, with budget development and board/superintendent relationships following. It is quite disconcerting to find that boards and superintendents across the state even hold disparate expectations, purposes and priorities for evaluation.

Another interesting theme that appeared was the inconsistent level of objectivity exercised in the evaluation process. Sixty-two percent of respondents claimed that their evaluation was either mostly objective or fully objective which leaves 40% of respondents claiming that their evaluation was only somewhat or not at all objective. This result relates to the question of whether the evaluation is supported with measurable data. Only 34% claimed that their evaluation was supported by data while 65% claimed it was either sometimes or not supported by data.

It is evident from this study that the evaluation practices across Washington State are not uniform, and in many areas, inconsistent with the preferences of superintendents for how they would like to be evaluated. Specific areas the researcher found to be statistically significant in terms of differences between practice and preference include: 1) differing board expectations at the time of hiring, 2) whether demographics and student achievement are considered in evaluation practices, 3) the level of objectivity in the evaluation process, 4) whether the evaluation is supported with measurable data and 5) the level of objectivity of the evaluation process also differed significantly in terms of practice and preference. Furthermore, only 65% of boards provided either specific or general expectations of responsibilities at the time of being hired, while 100% of superintendents prefer either specific or general expectations communicated to them.

Limitations

The survey was administered in the summer that may account for the low response rate of 22%. However, when comparing the size of the districts of superintendents who took the survey against the entire state, the sample is generally representative. For example, 25% of the superintendents who took the survey were from districts with student populations fewer than 300. The state has about 25% of all districts with student population fewer than 300 as well. Approximately 7% of superintendents who took the survey were from districts with student population from 2,500-2,900 and the same for populations of 5,000-9,999. State percentages for these two groups come out to about 9%. Even though the response rate is less than desirable, the researcher still believes, based on the comparison data that the population of participants reflects that of the state when comparing size. An additional limitation worth noting is that potential bias may occur with a volunteer sample (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Another limitation is that not all of the tables could be calculated for determining significance between practice and preference due to the categorical nature of some of the items, therefore there may be rich data that has not been brought to light in this current study.

Finally, since the design of this current study was somewhat replicating an original study from 2004, the validity of the survey ought to be considered. Perhaps as the researcher scales up this study to a larger population, a confirmatory factor analysis may need to be conducted. The original survey was conducted throughout the United States while this current study solicited participants from Washington State only. Therefore, a comparison between the original study to this one was not included as part of the results or discussion, even though this would be very insightful.

Implications for Research and Practice

According to the results of this study, superintendent evaluation processes and practices differ widely across the state. Furthermore, there is a disparity between current practices and how superintendents prefer their evaluation to occur. This includes the criteria for evaluation and level of objectivity. Superintendents prefer their evaluations to be mostly objective, supported with measurable data, including student achievement data. They prefer their evaluations to be measured against specific criteria with clear expectations and guidance of performance. However, this ideal may be difficult to obtain with the current landscape of evaluation revealing so many differing and often conflicting methods. This is further complicated by the lower levels of objectivity reported and compounded with a general lack of perceived training and knowledge in evaluation procedures to be able to assess the superintendent effectively. With 43% of superintendents reporting that less than 25% of his/her board members and 20% claim that less than half of his/her board members have the training and knowledge to evaluate objectively is alarming. Eadie (2008) provided several recommendations for effective evaluation processes which start with planning, developing and executing a well-designed process for evaluation. Some recommendations include meeting outside of a regular board meeting, developing criteria for evaluation that includes goal-setting, having face-to-face dialogue and creating this process ahead of time for the upcoming year (Weiss, 2014). Henrikson (2018), adds to this set of recommendations by encouraging boards to utilize a standards-based framework to allow for establishing clear criteria ahead of time as well as providing regular opportunities for ongoing data-collection in an authentic and objective way.

Further research ought to be aimed at scaling up this current project. In the original study, the superintendents from across the United States were surveyed whereas this project sought the feedback only from one state. It would be interesting to not only compare the current evaluation practices across the state to the sample from this study, but to also gain a wider perspective of challenges from across the nation. Furthermore, it is imperative to also gain insight from the school board directors themselves, compare results to the results of the superintendent sample in order to better understand the existing challenges from a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

The need to balance strong accountability with the recognition of each district's unique demographics to create an effective and consistent evaluation process is critical. With the move towards stronger accountability at all levels as well as a tightening up of evaluation processes for K-12 it is time to continue this trend to district level personnel. As noted in the original study by Mayo and McCartney in 2004, it is well overdue to insist on requiring more rigorous and ongoing board training and preparation to develop effective evaluation processes. Given the need for strong communication practices between the board and superintendent, the current subjective nature of evaluation is ineffective. It is imperative for school boards and policy makers to recognize the political and dynamic nature of the superintendency and to work systematically to establish equitable and consistent practices.

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