

SUPERINTENDENT LENGTH OF TENURE AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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This quantitative study, utilizing the backward method of multiple regression, examined the relationship between the length of tenure of a superintendent and academic achievement as defined by the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. To put this relationship into context, five other predictive variables were included as a part of this study: the individual's total length of experience as a superintendent, the superintendent's total length of experience in education, each district's assessed valuation per pupil, each district's percentage of students who qualified for free or reduced meal prices, and each district's total student headcount. To gain the most comprehensive view possible, all 295 Kansas school districts in existence in 2008 were included in this study. Although included as one of the four predictive variables that had a significant effect on the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, the primary focus of this study – to examine the impact a superintendent's length of tenure has on students' academic achievement – proved to have the least relative impact, according to beta weights.

Keywords: superintendent length of tenure, student achievement

The position of public school superintendent as we know it came into being during the latter part of the twentieth century. The superintendent's role as redefined in Carter's *The American School Superintendent* (1997) evolved into a wide spectrum of responsibilities, including serving as the "professional advisor to the board, the leader of reforms, the manager of resources, and the [chief] communicator to the public" (p. 24). Prior to that, the scope of the superintendent's duties and responsibilities centered around aspects of business management and maintaining an efficient system for providing educational opportunities to those few individuals lucky enough to be able to enjoy an organized educational experience, beginning with the early schools of the northeastern portion of the United States. These "Common Schools," originally managed by town councils, ultimately became complex and large enough to warrant a position dedicated to maintaining the day-to-day operations of the school. Thus, in 1837 the Buffalo, New York, Common School Council appointed the first superintendent to "carry out the policies of the board" (Carter, 1997, p. 22). While this newly created position was justified, in all reality, the pre-twentieth century school superintendent had much in common with a "Superintendent of the Railroad," basically making sure that the educational "trains ran on time."

Then, due to population growth and the availability of formalized school opportunities offered to more students, the public school superintendent evolved into a position geared for a person with the abilities "to manage [a] great business or industrial enterprise" (Thomas & Moran, 1992, p. 42). Thus, the educational industry embraced the concepts of the "Science of Management," which changed the superintendent's role from occupation to a profession and attracted individuals who Thomas and Moran (1992) describe as being "planners and thinkers" (p. 42). These planners and thinkers developed structures for efficiency.

Ultimately, the role of the superintendent shifted to one with greater emphasis in providing leadership to "build the bridge from chaos to clarity for every stakeholder so that students, teachers, parents, leaders, and the broad community know what success really means" (Reeves, 2002, p. 77). Simultaneously, with the acknowledgement of the professionalism required for a person to serve as a superintendent, the early part of the twentieth century witnessed the development of Educational Administration as a formalized field of study (Iannaccone, 1996). This latter development solidified the profession as one worthy of forward thinking individuals desiring to impact the educational development of the students.



The emphasis on efficiency, while never leaving the consciousness of the superintendent, took a back seat to other issues brought on by societal factors and demands as the twentieth century progressed. Political realities and pressures of the 1960's, the emphasis placed on test scores in the 1970's (Yee & Cuban, 1996), and the stipulations for individual student achievement found in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001: Student Achievement, 2004) have further shaped the role of the modern public school superintendent. In fact, Peterson and Young (2004) proclaimed in their article exploring the influence NCLB has on district-level leaders, "The demand for proven results, extensive evaluations, and data-driven decision making has moved the superintendent from the sideline to the frontline of supporting student achievement" (p. 1). This is a vantage point relatively new to school superintendents.

Along with the shifting roles of the superintendent, the job is fraught with multiple, serious challenges (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Fowler, 2009). The sheer eclectic nature of the job is such that a "successful" superintendent must possess a wide variety of skills. Superintendents must be able to effectively deal with myriad issues that call on a variety of leadership attributes. The successful superintendent facilitates the creation of the vision of the district's educational programs, manages the business aspects of the district, and serves as the lead communicator with the public.

While the "successful" superintendent must possess a variety of professional skills to flourish, the most daunting aspect of the profession is that it is so very political. In their article, Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) pointed out that they "began to realize that the superintendency is not a position in education but a position of politics" (p. 655). Other sources agree with this assessment, making the point that first and foremost the position is much more political in nature than one might realize when initially entering it (Roan & Hardy, 1996). In fact Callahan's "Vulnerability Theory" (1962) and Iannaccone and Lutz' "Dissatisfaction Theory" (Alsbury, 2003) both explore explanations beyond job performance or competence as to why superintendents leave their positions within a given school district. In his "Vulnerability Theory" Callahan posits that superintendent mobility is directly related to the "extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen to public criticism and pressure" (Iannaccone, 1996, p. 111). The "Dissatisfaction Theory" takes this line of thinking a step further, explaining that superintendent turnover occurs as a natural outcropping of community dissatisfaction with existing school policy. This dissatisfaction eventually leads to the defeat of incumbent school board members, which leads to an involuntary turnover of the superintendent and ultimately a change in school policy (Alsbury, 2003).

As Robert Rammer (2007) points out, "Public school superintendents ultimately are responsible for the success or failure of the schools within their district" (p. 67). In years past, the definition of "success or failure" was a fairly private assessment. Generally speaking, if the "educational product" produced by the school system satisfied the local community, the district was a success. If the district's expectations for a graduation rate were merely 50%, and the district met this mark, a district would be considered a success. Now, NCLB defines success as a mark of academic achievement of the students of a district as it relates to a set of normed assessments and Annual Yearly Progress. This shift in thinking poses a challenge for the educational community of the country and in Kansas, as well.

This challenge is particularly difficult in states, like Kansas, that are mainly rural, with the majority of the state's districts being located away from population centers of 50,000 people or more (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data). This fact intensifies the challenge of meeting the stipulations of individual student achievement as set forth by NCLB. Rural schools, particularly small rural schools, experience limited internal opportunities for addressing academic and instructional needs due to fewer financial and instructional resources (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Coupling an understanding of the negative impact limited resources have on a school district with the fact that the majority of the districts in Kansas are experiencing declining enrollment numbers (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data) heightens the seriousness of this situation as districts' financial situations become more challenging. This potentially brings forth a presence of "uncertainty, stress and organizational conflict" (Lasher, 1990, p. 94). It becomes obvious that the Kansas superintendent's ability to positively impact student achievement has been hampered as it takes a minimum level of financial resources to provide educational programming for the students of the district.

Highlighting this point, Augenblick and Myers, a renowned research organization, completed a report commissioned by the Kansas Legislative Council, recommending the base state aid per pupil in Kansas should be at the “Foundation level (base cost)...equivalent to \$4,650 in 2000-2001.” When this report was completed, though, the base state aid per pupil in Kansas was set at \$3,820 (2002). Although the current base state aid per pupil is slightly higher now, in 2011 (\$3,870), it is still several hundred dollars beneath the funding level recommended in 2000-2001. Thus the superintendent is forced into the position of needing to be able to do more with less. Indicative of the pervasive nature and seriousness of this issue, at the writing of this article, 43 of the 50 states had dealt with court cases centered on school finance and providing adequate educational opportunities to their students (LaMorte, 2012).

Along with the fiscal realities and challenges incumbent with leading a rural school district, Kansas’s superintendents also face an additional challenge because of the state’s rural nature. Public school superintendents in most areas of Kansas serve in a “generalist” role. Rather than focusing on one or two aspects of the school system, the generalists maintain a certain level of competence in many areas. It is not enough to be an expert in curriculum and instruction, for example, when the nature of the position demands that the majority of Kansas superintendents be versed in a variety of unrelated areas, such as facility and plant management, budgeting and school law. Unfortunately, this reality is not unique to Kansas, as “the average American public school district serves fewer than 2,500 students” (Chapman, 1997, p.31), thus forcing most superintendents to serve as generalists.

Unfortunately, according to the research conducted by Tallerico (1996), generalists are generally less satisfied in their positions than those superintendents who are able to focus their attentions on a few rather than on a whole array of activities. This dissatisfaction emanates from a sense of poor preparation for the wide scope of responsibilities that are put forth for the generalist superintendent. In the end, more often than not, dissatisfaction leads to a superintendent moving from one district to another or else leaving the profession altogether. When frequent leadership changes occur, regardless of the size of the school district, it “creates a public perception of increased instability, lowered morale, a loss of organizational direction and ‘vision,’ and a general sense by the staff of ‘here we go again’ that the district will undergo yet another round of short-lived programs and policies” (Yee and Cuban, 1996, p. 616). This phenomenon is particularly vexing as the student achievement goals of NCLB continue to become more challenging.

Another impact of serving as a superintendent in the “typical” Kansas school district is the familiarity that comes along with being a part of a smaller educational community. The community has more personal access to the superintendent in a small or rural district. In a larger or urban district, however, there is less of a chance that members of the educational community know the superintendent on a personal level (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). While this can be viewed as a negative, anonymity also serves as a buffer when issues arise. In small rural districts in particular, community members have a direct relationship with the members of the board of education and superintendent. If there is conflict between the superintendent and the community or the board members, the probability of the superintendent having to change positions increases.

Likewise, being a part of a smaller or isolated educational community also lends itself to an environment where perceived dissatisfaction with the superintendent do not relate to educational nor financial issues; rather it deals with “personalities, whims of the board of education, and board involvement in petty matters” (Parker, 1996, p. 76), which can lead to superintendent turnover. In fact, in 2008 only 39% of the superintendents in Kansas had been in their current positions for more than five years (Hays, 2008, Kansas Association of School Boards, 2007-2008 Kansas Administrator Salary Survey Data). While superintendent professional job movement is a reality, continuity in the superintendency provides the local educational community with consistency of leadership and design. This has an impact on student achievement (Stratton, 2008). Given this reality, it is obvious this situation needs to be addressed so as to provide a better opportunity for the education of the students of the state. Much of Kansas will remain rural in nature, so the aspects of a rural school district will remain in force for some time to come, continuing the complicated, multifaceted nature of the Kansas superintendent.

While the challenges facing the superintendents across the country, as well as in Kansas, seem almost insurmountable, superintendents need to remain focused on their mission. Research shows that superintendents positively impact student achievement by fulfilling their duties in a responsive manner (Waters & Marzano, 2006) and by utilizing a



“comprehensive goal-setting process to develop board-adopted non-negotiable goals for achievement” (Waters & Marzano, 2007, p. 14). By taking these actions, the situation will develop in which a superintendent can provide the educational achievement opportunities for the students of the district.

The success of any Kansas public school system is now defined by the student achievement demonstrated on the annual Kansas State Assessments. Extensive research has been conducted on the power and impact of the classroom teacher and the building-level administrator, but little is known about the influence the district superintendent has on student achievement. Mainly, evidence exists that superintendents primarily impact student achievement through the “promotion, support and development of principals as instructional leaders” (Cudeiro, 2005, p. 16). Aside from the important activity of developing pervasive goals for the district from top to bottom, little else is known about the influence of the superintendent on student achievement.

The focus of this present research is to investigate the impact public school superintendent tenure has on student achievement as shown by the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessments. The researcher chose to focus on academic achievement in reading over other academic areas as “the ability to read and comprehend is foundational to individual and national success” (Hock, Brasseur, Deshler, Catts, Marquis, Mark, & Wu Stribling, 2009, p. 21) and, as Berman and Biancarosa (2005) point out, “that for too many students, literacy instruction ends in Third Grade” (p. 1). This is particularly poignant as students who struggle to read are at greater risk of never earning a high school diploma (Berman & Biancarosa, 2005). The researcher also chose to focus on reading because one of the cornerstones of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is “to support states in making every child a proficient reader by the end of the third grade” (Helf, Cooke, & Flowers, 2008, p.113). This focus can be restated as a broad framing question: Does research show that superintendent longevity and student achievement are correlated?

In order to meet the goal of providing a quality educational experience for each student, NCLB mandated that all students “be taught by ‘highly qualified’ teachers (HQT) focused on helping all students reach a level of proficiency in both reading and math by 2014” (Sergiovanni et al., 2009, p. 16). This requirement has placed extra pressure on superintendents as maintaining a “highly qualified” teaching staff has become increasingly difficult as the nation is experiencing “staggering [levels of] teacher turnover and [an increased] attrition rate” (Unraveling the “Teacher Shortage” Problem, 2002, p. 3). This situation becomes even more problematic as a teacher may not actually be a quality instructor although he or she has earned the title of “highly qualified.” In fact, Therrien and Washburn-Moses (2009) cite research by McLeskey and Brownell that there is no evidence that the Highly Qualified mandate is increasing teacher quality. Further, according to their research, only 12% of the surveyed Ohio building administrators reported, “a teacher who meets HQT criteria should be considered a more effective and competent educator” (Therrien & Washburn-Moses, 2009, p. 15). Thus, the superintendent must remain ever cognizant of the actual instructional practices taking place in the classroom, serving as a “teacher of teachers,” emphasizing data-driven instructional decision making to influence teacher classroom behaviors (Sergiovanni et al., 2009), and never taking for granted that the students are receiving an educational experience that will lead to increased achievement.

The superintendent must strike a balance, though, between being involved with the instructional practices and micro-managing the instructional practices of the teachers. Too much involvement in the educational process can serve to work against the educational experience, particularly if the administration engages in what Ella Flagg Young, the first female superintendent of Chicago, called “close supervision” of the teachers, which she opposed, saying “... no more un-American or dangerous solution of the difficulties involved in maintaining a high degree of efficiency in...teaching...can be attempted then that which is effected by...close supervision” (Webb & McCarthy, 1998, 226).

Although criticisms continue to mount against NCLB, particularly as the 2014 deadline of 100% proficiency approaches, the legislation remains in place, so the superintendent faces yet another challenge. Along with simply making all of the adjustments necessary to meet the obligations of the law, the superintendent must also continually work with the school board and the greater educational community to maintain a focus on achieving the mandates of the law, even if it is an unpopular action to take. To achieve this goal, it is necessary for the superintendent to act in a way with a greater “emphasis on interpersonal perspectives and a focus on the development of followers...to improve student learning” (Amatea, Behar-Horenstein, & Sherrard, 1996, p. 243). Acting in this manner will focus the energies of the

educational community, pulling everyone together to work for increased student achievement.

Regardless of the good works of the superintendent, as public and political pressures continue to surface surrounding public schooling in the United States, superintendents find themselves engaged in a constant struggle to maintain a focus on the “true business at hand—educating children—in an environment in which interest group politics, board relations, and regulatory muddle conspire to handcuff their leadership” (Orr, 2006, p. 1366). In order to maintain this focus, the superintendent must be able to, as Sergiovanni et al. (2009) puts it “read and navigate increasingly complex political landscapes” (p. 221) at the local, state and federal levels. This takes on even more significance, considering that “Public school superintendents ultimately are responsible for the success or failure of the schools within their district” (Rammer, 2007, p. 67). Given this perspective, it is imperative that superintendents comprehend that it takes the proper employment of political and leadership skills to build support for their efforts that meet district procedural and organizational goals to benefit student achievement (Gorton, Alston & Snowden, 2007).

For a variety of reasons, including the increased attention given to the accountability of the actions of the public schools and due to the highly political and lonely aspects of the position (Roan and Hardy, 1996), the situation exists across the nation where the superintendency may be evolving into more of a temporary position as an increasing number of superintendents and boards of education view constant job movement and the lack of longevity of the superintendency as a part of the profession (Clark, 2001). This frequent turnover leads to increased instability of the academic environment, which, more often than not leads to additional turnover (Yee & Cuban, 1996), creating a seemingly never ending journey through a maze of organizational dysfunction. This reality is discouraging, as evidence suggests in the business world that stability of leadership accounts for a large measure of the success for major corporations (Waters & Marzano, 2007). This begs the question – If stability in major corporations brings about a certain amount of organizational success, would not the same hold true for the “school corporations” of the nation? It is this very question that must be examined to further define how best to provide educational opportunities that will enhance student academic achievement in our schools.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of the length of superintendent tenure of Kansas districts on student achievement as defined by the results of the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessments. In order to put this impact into context, this study also examined the relationship of five other predictive variables on the percentage of students who scored “Proficient” or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to answer the following questions:

- What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
- What is the relationship between an individual’s total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
- What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
- What is the relationship between a Kansas district’s assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
- What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?
- What is the relationship between a Kansas district’s percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?



The significance of this study is timely because greater emphasis is being placed on school accountability, as evidenced by individual student achievement as shown on the Kansas State Assessments. Although districts are doing a better job of meeting the ever-demanding challenge of showing student achievement as defined by the Kansas State Assessments, it is only a matter of time before districts reach the level where they will not be able to meet the goals of that year. To address this problem, it is necessary to seek the most effective ways to meet the demands of this accountability system. A great amount of research has been conducted on teacher quality, instructional practices, curriculum, and on the impact of building-level administrators on student achievement. Thus, it is logical to investigate the impact the superintendent has on student achievement. Examining the possible impact superintendent tenure longevity has on student achievement is one area of study that would shed light on the overall impact of the role of the superintendent on individual student achievement.

As Gall, Borg, and Gall point out (1996), it is beneficial to use the largest sample possible in a quantitative research project, so the researcher decided to take a “snapshot” of student achievement of all 295 Kansas school districts in 2008. This provided a comprehensive view of the impact of the questions being researched. The dependent variable for the study, the percentages of tested students from all districts who earned a score of “Proficient” or above for the 2008 testing year on the Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, were recorded. Subsequently, six predictive variables (three dealing directly with superintendent experiences and three dealing with demographic factors of the districts) were recorded for each district:

- The length of tenure of each district’s superintendent.
- Each superintendent’s total number of years’ experience as a superintendent.
- Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience in education.
- Each district’s assessed valuation per pupil.
- Each district’s percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices.
- Each district’s total number of students.

As stated previously, three of the six predictive variables, including the primary focus of this study, described data from the 2007-2008 school year regarding the length of time the superintendents spent in education, regardless of the position they held. These included the following:

- Length of tenure of each district’s superintendent.
- Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience as a superintendent.
- Each superintendent’s total number of years of experience in education.

These descriptive data were chosen for inclusion in the study due to researcher interest in the relationship each variable has with student academic achievement.

The other three predictive variables used in this study were related to district demographics and were chosen for inclusion in the study because they all help in defining a district’s financial picture and play a part in providing educational programming for the students. These variables included the following:

- Each district’s assessed valuation per pupil.
- Each district’s percent of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices.
- Each district’s total number of students.

To gain the greatest perspective on this issue, the researcher used a multiple regression process exploring the relationship of six predictive variables as they related to the dependent variable of this quantitative study, the academic achievement of the students.

Given the frequency of turnover associated with the superintendency, it was not feasible to gather a population large enough to conduct a longitudinal study extending over several years utilizing multiple regressions, as there should be ten to fifteen cases of data per predictor (Field, 2009). According to Field, "Regression analysis... enable[s] us to predict future [outcomes] based on values of the predictor variables" (Field, 2009, p. 198). Specifically, the backward method of multiple regression "calculat[es] the contribution of [each predictive variable] by looking at the significance value of the t-test for each predictor.... If a predictor meets the removal criterion (i.e. if it is not making a statistically significant contribution to how well the model predicts the outcome variable) it is removed from the model" (Field, 2009, p. 213). The remaining variables are then assessed to determine their contribution to the outcome of the dependent variable. Data regarding the dependent variable and the six predictive variables were compiled and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 17.0 software program.

The six research questions were addressed by conducting descriptive and correlational analyses to discover the significance of the predictor variables in contributing to the dependent variable. The researcher checked to ensure that the assumption of no multicollinearity had not been violated by having any variables that were too closely related to one another by checking the Pearson correlation coefficient, the tolerance level, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) values between the six predictive variables (Field, 2009).

The level of significance was set at $p < .05$. To check the statistical significance and relative importance of each predictive variable, the researcher examined the unstandardized coefficient beta weights and the standardized beta weights of each predictive variable. In addition, an R Square was used to examine the relationships between the various predictive variables and the dependent variable.

Utilizing the backward method of multiple regression in analyzing the data produced three summary models to examine. Although all three models were shown to be significant since they all showed significance levels of $p < .001$, only data for the third model is included here as it was found to be the most parsimonious, having excluded two of the predictive variables based on removal criterion (the significance value of the t -test for each predictive variable).

As displayed in Table 1, model 3 of the results of the backward multiple regression analysis shows that the remaining predictive variables: Total Headcount, Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent, and the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent did predict performance on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment. The R Square revealed that 9.9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment, was accounted for by the predictive variables in the model retained, $F(4, 294) = 7.980, p < .001$.

Table 1
Four Predictive Variables Used

Model	R Square	df1	df2	F	Sig.
3	.099	4	294	7.980	.000

Analysis was then conducted to test the unique contribution between these predictive variables and the dependent variable, assigning coefficients to each predictive variable. As displayed in Table 2, the beta weight for Length of Tenure of Superintendent was .138, the beta weight for Total Years as a Superintendent was -.167, the beta weight for Percentage of Free and Reduced Students was -.191, and the beta weight for Total Student Headcount was -.201. Based on these results, among the four remaining predictive variables, Total Student Headcount had the



strongest effect on the dependent variable, followed by Percentage of Free and Reduced Students, Total Years as a Superintendent, and the Length of Tenure of the Superintendent. Also, a *t*-statistic was derived to test whether each *b*-value was significant at the .05 level. All four of the remaining predictive variables were shown to significantly make a contribution to the model.

Table 2
Four Predictive Variables Used

	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
Length of Tenure Supt.	.326	.138	2.005	.046
Total Years as Supt.	-.245	-.167	2.429	.016
Percent of Free and Reduces Students	-.133	-.191	3.426	.001
Total Student Headcount	.000	-.201	3.595	.000

Concise answers to the research questions posed earlier are as follows:

- What is the relationship between the total length of tenure of a superintendent of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The length of a superintendent's tenure was shown to significantly impact the outcome of the dependent variable at the .05 level.

- What is the relationship between an individual's total number of years of experience serving as a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The total number of years' experience as a superintendent was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

- What is the relationship between the total number of years of experience in education of a Kansas school superintendent and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The total number of years of experience in education was not shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

- What is the relationship between a Kansas district's assessed valuation per pupil and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The district's assessed valuation per pupil was not shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

- What is the relationship between the total student enrollment of a Kansas school district and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The total student enrollment was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

- What is the relationship between a Kansas district's percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices and student academic achievement as shown on the 2008 Third Grade Kansas Reading Assessment?

The percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced meal prices was shown to significantly impact the outcome variable at the .05 level.

While this final model accounted for less than 10% of the variance of the dependent variable, meaning that over 90% of the variance in the dependent variable is accountable to other factors, this study does reveal that aspects of the superintendency do play a part in student academic achievement, specifically the length of tenure of the superintendent and the total years of experience as a superintendent. This information is important as the focus on individual student academic achievement will continue to be emphasized in the years to come, so it is essential to examine all possible contributing factors. Of particular interest, data showed that, as the length of tenure of a superintendent increased, so did the percentage of students who scored "Proficient" or better on the 2008 Third Grade Reading Assessment.

Interestingly, while the length of tenure of the superintendent indicated a positive relationship on academic achievement, the other three variables retained in Model 3 proved to have a negative impact on academic achievement. As the total years a person served as a superintendent, the percentage of free and reduced students in the district, and the total student headcount of the district increased, the academic achievement of the students decreased. Thus, further research is warranted to discover the impact these negative influences have on the length of tenure of the superintendent and on student academic achievement.

As this study revealed, the length of tenure of a Kansas superintendent does have a significantly positive impact on student academic achievement. It is important that steps be taken to assist superintendents in surviving and prospering in this position. Specifically, the following recommendations are offered. Institutions of higher education should consider

- improved post-secondary superintendent preparation programs;
- creation of a research-based superintendent mentor program;
- promotion of formal and informal superintendent support groups;
- continued emphasis in training school board members in the concepts of proper boardsmanship; and
- on-going training and support for superintendents in properly dealing with the politics and stressors of the position. (Chapman, 1997)

In conclusion, in the 170 years that the position of the public school superintendent has been in existence, the roles and duties of that position have fundamentally changed. Initially, the duties of the superintendent mainly focused on serving as a clerk for the board of education, taking care of the day-to-day operations of the school. That is definitely not the case of the modern day superintendent, as the role of the superintendent has taken on a more important function. It is now a professional position that plays a pivotal part in the continuation of our democracy by influencing how we educate our children (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, and Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

Assuming that the superintendent does play an important role in the preservation of our country, interestingly, very little research has been conducted on the direct impact the superintendent has on student academic achievement. This study is but one small step on the path to understanding the superintendent's impact on student academic achievement. Further research on this subject is more than overdue.



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