THE ROLE OF FEEDBACK
WITHIN THE SUPERINTENDENT EVALUATION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

As the leader of an educational organization, the superintendent plays a critical role in the system’s success. The task of evaluating the top leader in a school district falls to the school board—a body of individuals with little to no background in education. The superintendent evaluation should provide feedback to facilitate the development of instructional leadership and promote student achievement. The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study framed in cultural-historical activity theory was to explore the experiences of eight New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process as it relates to feedback that promotes instructional leadership. Participants represented a variety of educational experiences and had worked in at least two school districts. The central research question was: What are the experiences of New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and how do they make sense of these experiences as it relates to feedback that promotes instructional leadership and increases student achievement? The analysis of the data revealed four super-ordinate themes: (a) the superintendent as instructional leader, (b) the superintendent evaluation process, (c) feedback for instructional leadership, and (d) influences on the evaluation process and the growth of instructional leadership. These four themes resulted in the following findings. Reflection and internal motivation promote the growth of instructional leadership. It was found through the current research that evaluation is one event and should be a mutually agreed upon process that benefits the superintendent and the organization in order to facilitate the achievement of goals. Hence, feedback should be ongoing and enhance the important relationship between the superintendent and school board. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: feedback, instructional leadership, superintendent evaluation
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CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The superintendent is primarily responsible for student achievement within a school district (Forner, Bierlein-Palmer, & Reeves, 2012; Moffett, 2011; Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2011; Whitt, Scheurich, & Skrla, 2015). School boards are also responsible for student achievement (Williams & Tabernik, 2011) and directly oversee the performance of the superintendent (Graham, Gorrow, & Muir, 2015; Williams & Tabernik, 2011). School boards are responsible for the evaluation of the superintendent and provide feedback within this process (Christina, 2012). This is one of the most critical aspects of the school board’s role within a district (Christina, 2012). However, the feedback that is provided within the superintendent evaluation process lacks meaningful comments that shape the superintendent’s role as an educational leader (Dipaola, 2010). School board members receive little training (Plough, 2014; Williams & Tabernik, 2011), which includes the evaluation process and thus may be ill prepared to complete the task. School board members may also have limited experiences in education (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

Therefore, the purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) study was to explore the experiences of school superintendents in New Hampshire with their performance evaluations. The central phenomenon was the feedback used within the evaluation and was generally defined as those elements of the process that promote instructional leadership.

Justification for the Research Problem

The superintendent, as the chief instructional leader (Graham et al., 2015), assumes the responsibility for student achievement within a school district (Moffett, 2011). The school board oversees the work of the superintendent and is legally responsible for evaluating this position annually according to New Hampshire state law (Christina, 2012). However, school board
members may not receive training in the evaluation process (Plough, 2014; Williams & Tabernik, 2011) and thus may be ill prepared to complete the task. School board members may also have limited experiences in education (Roberts & Sampson, 2011) and do not always possess the necessary skills to complete the task effectively due to deficiencies in training (Plough, 2014; Williams & Tabernik, 2011). Moreover, feedback within the performance evaluation can enhance performance (Hackman & Porter, 1968). According to Tuytens and Devos (2011), those administering the feedback affect the evaluation process. Therefore, school board members can use the evaluation process and the feedback within to support the superintendent’s growth as an instructional leader.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Much research abounds on the teacher evaluation process and the principal as an instructional leader. However, little research exists that specifically explores the ability of the superintendent evaluation process to develop instructional leadership and influence student achievement. There is little information available to school board members and superintendents to guide them in the process of the superintendent evaluation. This includes specific suggestions on the written feedback to enhance the superintendent’s practice as an instructional leader.

**Relating the Discussion to the Audiences**

This body of research will benefit local and national boards. School board members have few relevant resources to facilitate the superintendent evaluation process. A closer look at feedback within the superintendent evaluation process can guide school boards as they participate in this critical process. Further, a body of information gathered by a current school board member can hold more value relative to other evaluators, as the work will speak to real-world problems within the process instead of hypothetical assumptions made by individuals outside of the process.
Finally, school superintendents can use this information to inform their practice, collaborate more effectively with their school boards, and promote instructional leadership within their districts.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

The evaluation of the superintendent is required by the federal government (House, 2012) and is an obligation of school boards (Christina, 2012; House, 2012). The focus of the process is on the oversight and growth of the superintendent (Christina, 2012). The evaluation must be completed correctly. Considering the magnitude of this task, there is a need to better understand this process; there are complexities within it. The appraisal of the superintendent is a unique process within the educational system. It is a responsibility of a school board and is completed by several evaluators with differing viewpoints on job performance (Christina, 2012).

Feedback affects performance (Hackman & Porter, 1968) and is an important component of the superintendent evaluation process (Christina, 2012). Further, feedback from the school board to the superintendent is a form of communication. Communication among stakeholders can advance the organization (Forner et al., 2012). Thus, the superintendent evaluation can foster student achievement (Finnan, McCord, Stream, Petersen, & Ellerson, 2015).

**Central Research Question**

The central research question was the following: What are the experiences of New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and how do they make sense of these experiences as it relates to feedback that promotes instructional leadership and increases student achievement?
Positionality Statement

As a sitting member of a local school board, I am aware firsthand of the difficulties school board members encounter with the written feedback within the superintendent evaluation process. Being a New Hampshire educator for over 27 years, I bring a variety of experiences and beliefs about education to the proposed research study. As an elementary school teacher for 10 years, I had little involvement with school superintendents. These individuals were viewed as authority figures responsible for creating policy and disciplining employees. School leadership, from my perspective, was in the form of the building principal. After 10 years in the classroom, I found myself developing and then leading an education department for the community college system of New Hampshire. My transition into higher education required relationship building with area school districts. Superintendents became my partners and clients as we worked together to provide training to school district personnel. These relationships allowed me to gain insight into the many roles of the superintendent and the complexity of the position. It was here I learned about the struggle between budgetary constraints and the needs of the district. I soon realized I could use my educational background and knowledge of other school districts to serve my own community.

As a mother of a first grader in 2006, I believed my educational background could benefit my local school board. That year proved to be a better time to become involved in this organization while my son was in school. At the time of this study, I sat on the school board in Salem, New Hampshire and had been a member for 10 years. My decisions on the school board were respected as I was determining the educational experience of over 3,500 students and one of these children was my own. As a school board, we had a positive working relationship; we are true collaborators. We firmly believed that all members bring strengths in specific areas to the group. We then looked to these individuals for background knowledge and guidance when needed. For
instance, when purchasing land, the school board sought and respected the advice from a member who was an attorney. I was the only educator on the school board. Thus, my colleagues on the school board valued my expertise when discussing topics such as curriculum and assessment or the need for additional support staff.

One area of focus for the Salem School Board was the superintendent evaluation process. The current tool was not adequately meeting our needs. In 2014, this researcher was charged with revising the superintendent’s evaluation process with the superintendent. There were few resources to guide this development process and to support school board members in its completion. This situation suggested that a closer look at the evaluation process and the feedback provided to school superintendents would be beneficial.

As a result of my work on the school board, I brought several assumptions about the superintendent evaluation process to the research. A main function of the school board is to oversee the work of the superintendent. However, school board members are elected officials who are often not trained as educators; they come to their positions bringing diverse professional experiences. They then use these experiences to complete the yearly performance evaluation of the superintendent. These perspectives can be helpful when reviewing the superintendent’s capabilities of managing the budget or overseeing district operations, depending upon members’ backgrounds. However, many school board officials bring little understanding of the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader to the performance evaluation process. Therefore, school boards can struggle with this process.

As superintendents reflected on their evaluation process and the feedback received, little emphasis was placed on this event to shape their development as instructional leaders. The connection is not direct, but the elements of the process can promote their professional growth.
The shared experiences did shed light on feedback that can contribute to their development. Thus, my experience as an educator and my position on the school board allowed me insight into the workings of the board, the needs of its members, the role of the superintendent, and the demands placed upon this position. It is important to note—the research was not conducted within the same school district where I served on the school board.

**Theoretical Framework**

Cultural-historical activity theory can explain the influence of evaluator feedback on instructional leadership to promote student achievement. Third generation cultural-historical activity theory by Engeström, beginning with his work in 1982 (Engeström & Glaveanu, 2012), provides a theoretical framework to structure an investigation of the development of the superintendent as an instructional leader, the current evaluation process, and the need for feedback to promote professional growth.

A better understanding of cultural-historical activity theory can be gained through a review of Engeström’s work (Engeström & Glaveanu, 2012). For over 30 years, Engeström’s research, based in activity-theoretical studies, has focused on work and learning. Engeström analyzed change in organizations within systems of activity. His first body of research examined the complex skills needed in the workplace. This area of study is known as developmental work research. Further, Engeström has completed extensive investigations on expansive learning, which connects to his work on activity theory (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007). Finally, Engeström’s cultural-historical activity theory is based within psychology (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutierrez, 2009).

Activity theory is a collective work that resulted from the Russian Revolution
and student movement activism, which heightened awareness in cultural and creative activities. This led several key Russian psychologists to expand their research. One such researcher was Vygotsky. (Sannino et al., 2009). Vygotsky created a simple generation of activity theory that involved an object and a tool. Engeström’s work added to this theory. Two students of Vygotsky, Luria and Lent’ev, also contributed to the development of activity theory: Luria with his work on brain damaged patients and Lent’ev with his work on soldiers undergoing rehabilitation (Sannino et al., 2009). Vygotsky, Luria, and Lent’ev looked to better society in their research; it was as a result of their work that activity theory developed. Another Russian psychologist, Davydov, influenced Engeström with his research on learning and change in the workplace. Activity theory was brought to the forefront of thinking through the student rebellion (Sannino et al., 2009). These early efforts of activity theory provided a foundation for the work of Engeström.

There were several factors that shaped Engeström’s work on cultural-historical activity theory: the student movement and studies of classroom teaching and work. This led Engeström to create the theory of expansive learning. Engeström also founded the Center for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE). It is through CRADLE that Engeström worked to create associations with other institutions (Sannino et al., 2009). Finally, Engeström used activity theory to investigate school change (Engeström, 2008).

**Cultural-Historical Activity Theory**

In a broad sense, activity theory uses real-life experiences to create theories. It then employs these systems to affect practice. Activity theory is based in practice and rooted in past viewpoints (Sannino et al., 2009). Activity theory focuses on individuals interacting with activities that are social in nature; the focus is on the object over the action. Objects are viewed in a larger sense beyond motivation, systems, and specific situations (Sannino et al., 2009). According to
Blackler (2009), the key elements to studying an organization with activity theory are the object of the activity and the activity system. Sannino et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of the object within activity theory. An exploration of the experiences of school superintendents with their evaluation process and how they make sense of these experiences will use feedback as the object of the activity to promote instructional leadership as the outcome with the ultimate goal of student achievement. Activity theory provides the structure for this analysis.

Cultural-historical activity theory is organized by a triangular shape with each of its elements at a point on the figure. Based on the simple triangle of Vygotsky, Engeström added other influential factors: (a) rules, (b) community, and (c) division of labor (Sannino et al., 2009). The elements have a reciprocal relationship to each other. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the superintendent’s evaluation process and how the feedback within it can facilitate the development of instructional leadership. The object of the activity, which is central to the theory, is feedback. This leads to the outcome of instructional leadership. The ultimate goal for the object is student achievement. The school superintendent is the subject. The tool is the specific evaluation instrument used by the school board to complete the performance review of the superintendent.

The rules are the school board policies, rubric and scoring, state standards, district goals and strategic plan of the school district, and the evaluation rubric that govern the evaluation process. The community is comprised of the school board, leadership team, school district employees, the community, and students. The division of labor is the school board hierarchy comprised of the chairman, vice chairman, and other members. The superintendent is also part of the division of labor.
Blackler (2009) provides an overview of Engeström’s work using activity theory. It is essential to analyze the objects of activity over an organization’s goals. This is a central focus for Engeström (Blackler, 2009). The research defined the superintendent as an instructional leader, examined the evaluation process, and explored the feedback that promotes professional growth to achieve the school district goal of student achievement. According to Blackler, the analysis of the activity is situational in which values are rooted within the object. Engeström used the term *horizon of possibility* to describe the object of the activity. Thus, the activity of the evaluation process occurs within the functions of the school board and the feedback that is provided is the
horizon of possibility. Further, individual actions are influenced by elements within the organization, such as tools. Shared tools are used to complete shared projects (Blackler, 2009). The tool used to complete the evaluation process is the actual evaluation instrument. Finally, according to activity theory, transformation occurs as individuals prioritize within activities. Actions are examined contextually with historical relevance. Activity theory also considers outcomes and is connected to objectives (Blackler, 2009). Thus, change or growth can occur within the superintendent as an instructional leader who can advance student achievement.

The activity system is a critical element of activity theory. The activity system should be looked at over the individual within the organization. The individual, as a social being, acts within the system and experiences conflict. However, the issues are resolved together within the system. This goes beyond resolving conflicts within the organization, but looks at them as the center of human activity; it is change-oriented. This theory also examines how the problems were resolved before and how they can be fixed differently in the future (Blackler, 2009). The superintendent evaluation can facilitate this process. The superintendent, as the subject, works within the system. The school board, as part of the division of labor, provides feedback within the performance evaluation. This feedback may result in conflict or work to develop the superintendent as an instructional leader who will promote student achievement. Thus, the object of activity and the activity system provide the framework for investigating instructional leadership, superintendent evaluation, and evaluator feedback.

Research. The work of Engeström on the cultural-historical activity theory provided the theoretical framework to examine the development of instructional leadership, the evaluation process, and feedback. Further, this theory structured the examination of the evaluation process within an organization. The specific elements of activity theory provided a clear connection to the
research. First, activity theory highlights an activity with a purpose (Blackler, 2009). The superintendent’s evaluation is a practice within a school district that has a specific purpose. Second, activity systems are used to analyze organizations and institutions (Blackler, 2009). School districts are organizations. Third, there is a focus on objects to facilitate actions (Blackler, 2009). The object is feedback. Fourth, the use of language is included (Blackler, 2009). The use of language or feedback within the evaluation process was the central focus of the work. Thus, these four factors provided the framework for exploring the feedback within the evaluation of superintendents to promote instructional leadership.
Researchers believe, “Change that brings about improved student performance has become the battle cry of school reform efforts” (Bird, Dunaway, Hancock, & Wang, 2013, p. 77). The top leaders play a critical role in the achievement of students within a school district—the superintendent (Moffett, 2011) and the school board (Marino, 2011; Plough, 2014). School board members generally do not have a background in education (Roberts & Sampson, 2011) and little formal preparation to fulfill their responsibilities (Marino, 2011; Plough, 2014; Williams & Tabernik, 2011). The professional development of school board members can affect student success (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). The evaluation of the superintendent is not identified as a critical exercise in need of training (Roberts & Sampson, 2011), yet it is an essential duty of school board members (Christina, 2012). Further, effective feedback within the evaluation process can improve job performance (Hackman & Porter, 1968).

The literature review will be organized in a patchwork pattern as topics will be introduced, discussed, and then connected to each other. First, student achievement is discussed and connected to the role of the superintendent within a school district. Second, the superintendent as an instructional leader is explored through the responsibilities and issues of the position. A connection to student achievement will be established. Third, a look at the responsibilities of the school board in relation to oversight and development of the superintendent is provided. Next, the superintendent evaluation is discussed, as this process relates to superintendent growth. Finally, an examination of feedback and job performance will inform the reader of the importance of feedback within the process. A connection will be made to meaningful feedback and the development of the superintendent as an instructional leader to increase student achievement.
Student Achievement

According to the Council of Chief School Officers (CCSO, 2015), the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards center on the continuous work of school leaders to improve outcomes. The means to increasing student success includes a focus on student achievement, instruction, assessment, professional development, safety of students, staff time and roles, family involvement, and management effectiveness. As the head of a school district, the responsibility for student achievement is with the superintendent (Forner et al., 2012; Spanneut et al., 2011).

An interesting connection found by Myers (2011) related superintendent tenure to student achievement; the duration of a superintendent’s service to a school district positively influences student success. More importantly, Whitt et al. (2015) believe there is a connection between student achievement and the role of the superintendent in instruction. The head of a school district must be accountable for instruction and be able to determine needs in this area (Whitt et al., 2015). Thus, the superintendent plays a critical role in student success, and as the head of a school district, the accountability of the achievement of its students is the responsibility of the superintendent (Forner et al., 2012; Spanneut et al., 2011).

The Superintendent

According to the CCSO (2015), the ISLLC Standards emphasize that the purpose of education is to prepare students for life after high school. This includes college or career pathways and the ability to contribute positively to society. The standards facilitate the leadership that is needed to transform schools and prepare district administrators for this task. Leaders must look beyond the oversight of daily operations of their schools and focus on continuous student success. Thus, the standards call for a new concept of educational leadership.
The ISLLC Standards highlight the need for instructional leadership in our nation’s schools (Council of Chief School Officers [CCSO], 2015). The emphasis is on learning-focused leaders. Increasingly, administrators are responsible for student success. School district leaders must look beyond the daily operations of their districts and schools to ensure students are prepared for life after the K-12 setting. This is not an easy task.

Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010) stated, “There is increasing evidence that leadership makes a difference in schools” (p. 315). The top leader in a school district is the superintendent (Graham et al., 2015). Thus, the superintendent plays a critical role in the development of student success (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson, 2011; Forner et al., 2012) and school improvement (Spanneut et al., 2011). According to the New Hampshire Department of Education (2016), there are currently 93 superintendents leading 95 school administrative units with two vacancies for the 2015-2016 school year in the state of New Hampshire. Further, as outlined by New Hampshire state law, the superintendent has specific roles in the operation of the organization (Graham et al., 2015).

The leader of a school district is the superintendent (Graham et al., 2015). Moffett (2011) divides the responsibilities of this position into three main categories; a superintendent must understand and be an expert in budget matters, human resources, and instruction, with instruction being the most critical. Instruction is tied to student success. Further, according to Graham et al. (2015), in this position, the individual oversees all aspects of the organization—policies, curriculum, instruction, assessment, facilities, personnel, budget, services for students, resources, community relations, and educational leadership (Graham et al., 2015). Thus, the superintendent is held accountable for numerous and diverse functions within a school district (Graham et al., 2015; Moffett, 2011).
In order to be effective school leaders and to improve student performance, superintendents must clearly understand their role as leaders and make performance adjustments (Spanneut et al., 2011). Hence, there are several factors that influence superintendent leadership and the qualities of effective superintendents to explore. These factors ultimately facilitate advanced student success (Lewis, Rice, & Rice, 2011). A look at the role of the superintendent within the school district as an educational leader provides deeper insight into the success of students within the organization (Lewis et al., 2011; Moffett, 2011). However, there are specific factors that affect the superintendent’s ability to focus on instructional leadership and student achievement (Bredeson et al., 2011).

According to Bredeson et al. (2011), there are elements that influence superintendent leadership: (a) size of the district, (b) culture, (c) geography, (d) financial aspects, and (e) political influences. These areas were shared with a focus on context-responsive leadership; the research examined those contexts that affect leadership (Bredeson et al., 2011). One factor that affects the superintendent’s work is the size of the district (Bredeson et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2011). According to Bredeson et al., the size of the district influences relationship building, trust, daily operations, and community relations. Lewis et al. (2011) further explained the impact of district size and performance factors. Organizations that are bigger in size cause the superintendent to deal primarily with personnel issues. This may take time away from other endeavors. Bredeson et al. believe the culture of the organization can be influenced by its size. However, successful superintendents adjust to the culture of their organizations (Bredeson et al., 2011). There are other factors besides the size of the district that impact the superintendent’s performance (Bredeson et al., 2011).
Bredeson et al. (2011) believe superintendents must also be aware of the differences within the community in relation to geography. This includes physical location, and community type (e.g., urban, rural, or suburban). The fiscal elements of districts differ too and pose challenges due to state and local funding guidelines and special education costs. The political climate at the local and federal levels affects the leadership of the superintendent. The superintendent must understand these factors and how they affect the organization. Further, superintendents need a positive vision to remain focused. Finally, the researchers found that superintendents hold student success at the forefront of their work (Bredeson et al., 2011). Thus, Bredeson et al. emphasized the importance of student success within the realm of the superintendent’s authority. Superintendents must be effective leaders in order to remain focused on student success (Bird et al., 2013).

According to Bird et al. (2013), superintendents believe their authenticity as leaders directly contributes to positive developments in their schools. Superintendents who exhibit high levels of authenticity as leaders promote positive improvements in their schools (Bird et al, 2013). Forner et al. (2012) also analyzed superintendents and their ability to lead school districts. The findings aligned with research formerly completed on leadership. One area of difference centered on goal setting. The research defines *leadership practices* as those activities used to facilitate areas needing attention. According to Forner et al., there are seven effective activities that provide further insight into effective leadership qualities. First, the goals created by the superintendent facilitate improvement within the organization. Second, the superintendent gains support for change through dialogue with stakeholders. These discussions focus on student learning. Third, the superintendent addresses issues positively within the organization to foster improvement. Fourth, the superintendent dismisses those administrators and teachers who do not function to the organization’s standards. Fifth, the superintendent ensures there is a relationship with principals.
Sixth, the superintendent works effectively with unions. Finally, the superintendent aligns district spending to better student achievement (Forner et al., 2012). Thus, high performing superintendents work to increase student success in their schools (Forner et al., 2012).

As the responsibilities of the school superintendent are numerous (Bredeson et al., 2011; Graham et al., 2015), there are other factors within the superintendency that impact student success (Lewis et al., 2011; Myers, 2011; Whitt et al., 2015). First, Myers (2011) believes the duration of service of the superintendent positively influenced student success. Next, Whitt et al. (2015) found there to be a connection between student achievement and the role of the superintendent in instruction. The head of a school district must accept accountability for instruction and be able to determine needs in the area. Further, Lewis et al. (2011) examined leadership standards of superintendents and found 35% of Alabama superintendents believed the area addressing instruction to be significant in their position. The superintendent plays a critical role in student success (Bird et al., 2013; Forner et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Spanneut et al., 2011), and there is a connection between the superintendency and instructional leadership (Moffett, 2011).

The position of the superintendent in a school district is poised to bring about change to better schools (Bird et al., 2013; Spanneut et al., 2011). The superintendent creates a vision and implements goals for student success (Lewis et al., 2011; Petersen, 2002). It is the superintendent that enacts the plan for instructional leadership within the district (Lewis et al., 2011). However, the connection between instructional leadership and school superintendents is not as clearly defined (Whitt et al., 2015) as it should be to increase student achievement.

Work has been done to connect the effectiveness of school principals to instructional leadership (Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, & Brown, 2014). Shatzer, Caldarella, Hallam, and Brown (2014) shared two forms of leadership theory that exist within schools: instructional and
transformation. When focusing on student achievement, transformation is not as effectual as instructional. Thus, instructional leadership is important to student success (Shatzer et al., 2014). However, Whitt et al. (2015) believe superintendents fail to recognize their role as instructional leaders and that they are responsible for the achievement of their students. In their minds, the success of students is dependent upon others. Interestingly, Whitt et al. (2015) found superintendents did not accurately examine their understanding of their own self-efficacy as instructional leaders; the absence of student success was rationalized by accusing others. In order to be effective instructional leaders, superintendents must correlate their role as instructional leaders with their own self-efficacy. Hence, superintendents must continually reflect on their abilities as instructional leaders and their work in this area to foster student achievement (Whitt et al., 2015). Further, according to Petersen (2002), the role of the superintendent, as an instructional leader, is still unclear, even though research supports this claim.

Research suggests there is a meaningful association between the vision a superintendent has for teaching and learning and student success (Lewis et al., 2011; Petersen, 2002). When asked, school board members and building principals believe the foresight of the superintendent contributes to student achievement (Petersen, 2002). Further, Bird et al. (2013) believe the superintendent is positioned to bring about improvements to schools. This is due to the relationships of the superintendent with stakeholders. It is the school board that can bring about school improvements as a result of its support of the superintendent’s vision and goals as an instructional leader (Petersen, 2002). Thus, school boards can facilitate the achievement of students (Marino, 2011; Petersen, 2002; Williams & Tabernik, 2011); its relationship with the superintendent is critical (Graham et al., 2015; Plough, 2014).
The School Board

According to Williams and Tabernik (2011), stable school districts are those that keep student achievement at the center of their work and do not let other initiatives become the emphasis. One area of concern for school boards is student achievement (Plough, 2014), and student achievement is influenced by the practices of school boards (Marino, 2011; Williams & Tabernik, 2011). Williams and Tabernik believe school boards must examine areas that affect this topic, and their members believe they must be dedicated to teaching and learning. Further, superintendents view school boards as less than successful when they fail to emphasize student success (Williams & Tabernik, 2011). According to Williams and Tabernik (2011), one individual in their sample of 178 superintendents noted the need for board members to focus on instruction over the continued focus on spending.

In the United States, there are approximately 90,000 school board members (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011). School board members are elected individuals who are primarily responsible for the oversight of the superintendent. Nationally, there are varying requirements to hold a seat on a school board. However, some qualifications remain consistent: residency and voter registration (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Roberts and Sampson (2011) also found a requirement of officials ranged from none to at least 24 years of age and the length of service is about two terms (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

As outlined by New Hampshire state law, the school board operates in two main areas: legislative and judicial. Some legislative duties are in the areas of policy, finance, and goals. Some judicial responsibilities include discipline, contracts, and dismissals (Graham et al., 2015). Further, school board members also have oversight of the superintendent (Williams & Tabernik, 2011).
school board also has the power to remove the superintendent from the position (Graham et al., 2015).

It is important to understand why individuals seek a seat on their local school board. According to Williams and Tabernik (2011), school superintendents have noted a shift in the reasons why individuals run for school board. In the past, candidates were focused on student needs. Now, those who aspire for school board seats look to monitor spending and improve financial accountability. Bredeson et al. (2010) believe school boards play a role within the political arena. They are political in character, but this differs among districts; this affects community relations. The role of the school board within the school district’s functioning is clearly defined (Graham et al., 2015; Williams & Tabernik, 2011). However, there are elements of boards that designate them as effective (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011; Plough, 2014).

According to Dervarics and O’Brien (2011), there are specific characteristics that make school boards effective. Effective school boards improve student success through expectations of performance, have a mutual understanding about student learning and make decisions to increase student learning, connect with individuals within and outside of the organization, use information, collaborate with each other and the superintendent, and participate in trainings (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011). Further, two important elements emerge when analyzing the work of school boards. The relationship with the superintendent is critical and there must be a focus on student achievement (Plough, 2014). The work of Plough is based on the viewpoints of school board members and interprets how they see their role and effectiveness within a school district. School board members identify with two primary functions within the district. First, they must guarantee that all students have the opportunity to learn to their fullest extent. Second, members must develop a working association with the superintendent, where the roles are defined. They must also
address community needs (Plough, 2014). However, school board members in many cases do not fully understand their position within the school district (Graham et al., 2015), nor are they provided the proper training to adequately fulfill their duties (Plough, 2014; Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Williams & Tabernik, 2011).

According to Roberts and Sampson (2011), state directors claimed that laws requiring board members to participate in professional development activities affected student achievement positively. As discussed above, the school boards have various duties (Graham et al., 2015; Plough, 2014; Williams & Tabernik, 2011), yet, there is a lack of training sought to properly prepare members for the tasks they are obligated to complete (Plough, 2014; Roberts & Sampson, 2011; Williams & Tabernik, 2011). According to Marino (2011), boards should base their actions on research. School board chairs believed their members were continuously seeking and operating under best practices. The researcher found training should be in the areas of self-evaluation, collaboration with other boards and the community, and goal setting (Marino, 2011). Williams and Tabernik (2011) found superintendents also noted the need for board member training.

A review of school boards by Roberts and Sampson (2011) across the United States found 31% of the states mandated some type of training for newly elected board members and individuals received less than 16 hours of professional development. The training varies and includes such topics as budget, legal, student services and negotiations. The researcher concluded that school board training should be a primary concern within districts, as this can influence student success (Roberts & Sampson, 2011).

The connection between the school board and the superintendent is multifaceted and always developing. An examination of the insights of school board members and superintendents of their working relationships yielded a different perspectives (Thompson, 2014). It is essential
that school boards and superintendents work towards a collaborative partnership (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011; Graham et al., 2015; Plough, 2014). This relationship can be fostered through communication (Graham et al., 2015). Forner et al. (2012) found successful superintendents engaged in clear discussions with school board members with a goal of student achievement. Superintendent performance evaluations can promote these discussions (Christina, 2012). The New Hampshire School Boards Association views the superintendent evaluation as a primary responsibility of school boards. In fact, this process can ultimately move the district forward. However, the evaluation must be completed correctly for results to occur (Christina, 2012).

The Superintendent Evaluation

The ISLLC Standards are used in New Hampshire to foster the growth of school leaders and provide a framework for performance. The leadership standards call for school administrators to understand how to evaluate schools and their systems and to facilitate enhancements. The evaluation of school leaders must include a measure in this area (CCSO, 2015). According to House (2012), the federal government began to require evaluations of school district administrators in order to receive some federal funds; this included the evaluation of the superintendent. The requirement came with billions of dollars in federal monies for school districts. The new initiative mandated the evaluation of the superintendent to include the use of a rubric to measure multiple areas. The evaluation should be developed with the help of the superintendent and may consist of multiple activities (House, 2012).

An examination of the superintendent evaluation, nationally, provides insight into the process. The School Superintendents Association’s (AASA) Superintendent Salary and Benefits Study informed the superintendent evaluation process (Finnan et al., 2015). This study consisted of 1,711 superintendents in the U.S. Superintendents from each state participated in the study. Of the
superintendents surveyed, 93% stated they received a yearly evaluation. Only 50% of the superintendents reported their appraisal was connected to the focus of the evaluation within the prior year. Further, 45.5% reported their performance evaluation was connected to criteria outlined in their contract. Of the superintendents surveyed, 18% reported the 360-degree method of feedback was used during the process and 36.3% indicated their evaluation results were shared with the public; this figure is somewhat increased from previous years. Finally, only 37.9% of the superintendents reported that their evaluation was tied to student success (Finnan et al., 2015).

Specifically, in the state of New Hampshire, the Department of Education mandates that all school boards are legally required to complete an annual performance review of the superintendent (Christina, 2012). According to the New Hampshire School Board Association (NHSBA), the evaluation of the superintendent is included in the position’s contract and is the policy of the school board. The purpose of the evaluation is multifaceted and is used to advance the district, develop clear guidelines for performance, administer feedback on efforts, set goals, and further establish the superintendent and school board partnership (Christina, 2012). The NHSBA suggests the performance evaluation process include specific elements and produce certain results. First, the purpose of the process is to provide supervision. Second, the procedure allows school board members to reflect on the growth of the superintendent. Third, feedback is given (Christina, 2012).

There are specific elements to consider within the superintendent performance evaluation (Christina, 2012), as evaluators tend to stress different criteria when completing performance evaluations (Chen, Wang, & Lee, 2010). The NHSBA suggests the evaluation can be based on goals or standards. There are five areas that should be included in the evaluation: (a) fiscal management, (b) curriculum, (c) delivery of instruction and student achievement, (d) relationship with the school board, and (e) administration of school facilities and personnel (Christina, 2012).
According to the NHSBA, one of the most critical responsibilities of a school board is to evaluate the performance of the superintendent (Christina, 2012). The NHSBA believes the evaluation of the superintendent will facilitate advances in schools. This is true if the evaluation is completed properly. It is important to understand the evaluation process of the superintendent. The NHSBA provides guidance for school boards in order to complete the superintendent evaluation. The purpose of the superintendent performance evaluation is to build relationships with the board, define leadership positions, develop a shared agreement, and ensure accountability to the community. In order to do this, both parties must understand the expectations of performance and the evidence that will be measured. The school board must also communicate new areas of focus or initiatives and not just discuss prior work (Christina, 2012).

According to Dipaola (2010), the evaluation of the superintendent is a unique process within the educational system. It is the legal responsibility of a school board that is completed by several evaluators with varying viewpoints on job performance. Considering the importance of this evaluation, there is a need to better understand this process; there are difficulties within it. Further, the feedback that is provided is vague and does little to facilitate growth (Dipaola, 2010). Thus, a closer look at feedback is needed to better understand the connection between the evaluation of the superintendent and student achievement. However, much of the research on performance feedback can be found in the medical profession or on teacher evaluation. Little information is available on feedback provided to superintendents within the evaluation process.

**Superintendent Evaluation Feedback**

The NHSBA provides guidelines on the components of the evaluation process (Christina, 2012). First, they emphasize the need for a tool that is effective. The evaluation should include
specific elements: (a) documentation, (b) standards and ratings, (c) evaluation conferences, and (d) written comments. The NHSBA suggests the written remarks should be constructive, positive and beneficial. The explanations should be useful. Thus, feedback is provided to the superintendent through written comments on the performance evaluation (Christina, 2012).

**Feedback Effectiveness and Job Performance**

Feedback is a critical component of effective evaluation practices. Specific areas of focus emerge throughout the literature on feedback such as how the feedback is provided (Tang & Chow, 2007) and the nature of the feedback (Duijnhouwer, Prins, & Stokking, 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008). The individuals providing the feedback also influence the evaluation process. There is a relationship between the leadership characteristics of the evaluator and the feedback (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Thus, the credibility of the source is essential for feedback to be effective (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979).

Hattie and Yates (2014) provide an overview of feedback. Historically, the concept of feedback was first used to discuss the regulation of machines. The notion of feedback was further developed in the subject of psychology and the work of the behaviorists; behavior is shaped through positive and negative feedback with the use of reinforcement to motivate the learner and achieve goal attainment. Today, feedback is a broad term with varied meanings (Hattie & Yates, 2014). According to Hattie and Yates (2014), numerous studies have been conducted to link the power of feedback to the manipulation of behavior. A review of the literature on effective feedback yields results on the effects on learning (Duijnhouwer et al., 2010) and specifically, student learning (Duijnhouwer et al., 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008).

Hattie and Timperley (2007) believe the level of feedback is important to student learning. When feedback is given at the personal level, it was found to not be effective. This feedback
involves praise of the learner. Conversely, when feedback is provided at the process level, this enables the learner to better understand the steps that need to occur to complete a task. Duijnhouwer et al. (2010) shared the influence of formative feedback and reflection on graduate writing students. Even though this study involved students and not employees, the results have merit for this discussion. Feedback does affect one’s ability to complete tasks (Duijnhouwer et al., 2010). Further, performance was affected when students received specific comments about their writing (Duijnhouwer et al., 2010). Lizzio and Wilson (2008) found qualities of feedback that are beneficial, like fairness. The above provides insight into the qualities of effective feedback. It is important to connect these characteristics to feedback and job performance. In order to better understand the effective feedback for school superintendents, a focus on performance feedback within the workplace is needed.

**Performance Feedback and the Workplace**

Hattie and Yates (2014) provide a deeper understanding of feedback and job performance. A person gives feedback to another individual. The information focuses on performance and often is given after learning is thought to have occurred (Hattie & Yates, 2014). There is a connection between feedback and job performance (Hackman & Porter, 1968); feedback affects motivation (Kaymaz, 2011) and motivation affects work (Guo, Liao, Liao, & Zhang, 2014). According to Guo, Liao, Liao, and Zhang (2014), it is important for employers to understand the critical role intrinsic motivation plays in behavior and how work is enhanced through intrinsic motivation (Guo et al., 2014). Also, Kaymaz (2011) found that feedback about performance will minimize uncertainty and this helps employees to better understand their performance. When this occurs, motivation increases. Further, expectancy theory offers a theoretical perspective to further understand this connection between motivation
and job performance (Hackman & Porter, 1968).

Hackman and Porter (1968), in their expectancy theory, provide key influences that affect one’s ability to succeed on the job. First, there are the specific results expected by individuals from working hard. Second, the individuals believe hard work can cause these outcomes. Third, the individuals appraise the outcomes. Expectancy theory explains how working hard increases as motivation rises. (Hackman & Porter, 1968). Hence, the connection between motivation and feedback has been established (Guo et al., 2014; Hackman & Porter, 1968; Kaymaz, 2011). It is now important to better understand those factors that constitute effective feedback.

Tang and Chow (2007) believe feedback is an important element to the learning process in job settings. Specific areas of focus emerge through the literature on feedback that can be applied to performance evaluations. Who is administering the feedback (Govaerts, Van de Wiel, & Van der Vleuten, 2013; Ilgen et al., 1979)? How is the feedback provided (Cox, Marler, Simmering, & Totten, 2011; Govaerts et al., 2013; Hardesty et al., 2014)? What specifically is communicated (Duijnhouwer et al., 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008)?

Who provides the feedback affects the evaluation process (Govaerts et al., 2013; Ilgen et al., 1979). The trustworthiness of the source is essential for feedback to be effective (Ilgen et al., 1979). According to Govaerts et al. (2013), evaluators need a set of specific skills in order to administer meaningful feedback. Evaluators must be able to adequately observe and evaluate the work and then use this information to form an opinion about the performance. Thus, the assessor must assume a certain level of skill when providing feedback and as an evaluator (Govaerts et al., 2013).

How the responses are provided also impacts the quality of the feedback (Cox et al., 2011; Govaerts et al., 2013; Hardesty et al., 2014). In their work on the effects of feedback on job
performance within organizations, Hardesty et al. (2014) found feedback, when paired with standards, was effective in assisting individuals to meet expected job functioning. Also, Govaerts et al. (2013) found written feedback must be accompanied by verbal feedback to be seen as more valuable. Feedback has more detail when given verbally. This helps the individual to better understand the concepts. Thus, feedback, in written form alone, provides less information than a discussion about performance (Govaerts et al., 2013). Further, Cox et al. (2011) believed the mode of delivering feedback could matter. For example, evaluators avoided administering difficult feedback face-to-face and this format was not preferred.

What is actually provided as feedback influences its effectiveness (Dogan, Steg, Delhomme, & Rothengatter, 2011; Govaerts et al., 2013; Skipper & Douglas, 2012). The use of feedback is related to human functioning. Dogan, Steg, Delhomme, and Rothengatter (2011) examined feedback that lacked evaluative qualities, which shed further light on feedback and performance. This type of feedback may also affect job performance in specific ways. First, when evaluating multifaceted skills, the feedback may not positively impact evaluations completed by the employees and the work itself. Second, feedback that lacks value can lessen the quality of work (Dogan et al., 2011).

Govaerts et al. (2013) found evaluators fluctuated in the substance and practicality of their feedback. According to Skipper and Douglas (2012), when individuals are failing in performance, praise that is process-oriented is more helpful than praise that is person-oriented. Person-oriented praise is such that it discusses the actual qualities of the individual while process praise uses terms that characterize the actual performance (Skipper & Douglas, 2012). Further, Guo et al. (2014) found in order to better functioning, evaluators should deliver developmental feedback to employees. Developmental feedback refers here to feedback that betters future work. Finally,
feedback should help to analyze performance and facilitate discussions (Tang & Chow, 2007). To summarize, the research on feedback abounds in the literature and individuals have provided criteria that constitutes its effectiveness (Cox et al., 2011; Duijnhouwer et al., 2010; Govaerts et al., 2013; Hardesty et al., 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ilgen et al., 1979; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008).

**Conclusion**

Research has shown that leadership matters in schools (Louis et al., 2010). The superintendent, as the head of a school district (Graham et al., 2015), is positioned to improve student achievement (Forner et al., 2012; Moffett, 2011; Spanneut et al., 2011) in the role of instructional leader (Moffett, 2011). School boards are also responsible for increasing student success, but need the proper training to do so (Roberts & Sampson, 2011). Communication between the superintendent and board members is critical to the working relationship of the individuals involved (Graham et al., 2015) and this communication can also help to increase student achievement (Forner et al., 2012). The evaluation of the superintendent can facilitate this growth, as there is a connection between this process and student achievement (Finnan et al., 2015).

It is important to emphasize that Roberts and Sampson (2011) do not include the evaluation of the superintendent among the desired training topics of school boards. Hence, school board members are not designating this as a topic worthy of professional development; yet, the evaluation of the superintendent is one of the most critical components of their work (Christina, 2012). Further, feedback is an essential component of performance development (Hackman & Porter, 1968) and can improve performance (Kaymaz, 2011).
A focus on effective feedback within the evaluation process can inform the superintendent and assist in the development of instructional leadership to ultimately increase student achievement. Through the IPA approach, the proposed research will bring to light experiences within the evaluation process and specific feedback that superintendents believe to be meaningful. In turn, this feedback can influence their growth as instructional leaders. There is little research available in this area.
CHAPTER 3—RESEARCH DESIGN

As the leader of educational organizations, superintendents play a critical role in the system’s success. Achievements are often measured by student performance. Research has shown that school district leaders affect the success of the organization (Louis et al., 2010). However, the task of evaluating the top leader in a school district falls to the school board, a body of individuals comprised of laypeople with little to no background in education. If the role of the superintendent, as an instructional leader, is critical to the organization, then the performance evaluation by the school board should provide feedback to promote growth in this area and, ultimately, to improve student achievement. The purpose of this IPA study was to explore those experiences of performance evaluations and the feedback received that leads to the development of instructional leadership for school superintendents in New Hampshire. The central phenomenon is the feedback used within the evaluation and was generally defined as those elements of the process that promote instructional leadership.

The central research question was the following: What are the experiences of New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and how do they make sense of these experiences as it relates to feedback that promotes instructional leadership and increases student achievement?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study framed in cultural-historical activity theory was to explore the experiences of eight New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and feedback that promotes instructional leadership. Participants represented a variety of educational experiences and had worked in at least two school districts. The central phenomenon was the feedback used within the evaluation and is generally
defined as those elements of the process that promote instructional leadership.

**Research Design**

A qualitative research design was used to explore the superintendent as an instructional leader, the evaluation process, and evaluator feedback. Qualitative data uses words to communicate findings. Qualitative research is a naturalistic study where the data examine an everyday situation, insights of the participants are gained, themes are uncovered, multiple interpretations of the data are conveyed, the people in the setting are understood, and the examination is provided in text (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, a deeper understanding of the superintendent as an instructional leader and of the evaluation process and feedback for professional growth were gained through the examination of multiples sources of data and themes. Further, qualitative data provided a deep analysis of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2011). Here, the phenomenon was the superintendent evaluation. Thus, a comprehensive investigation of a phenomenon lent itself to the research tradition of an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

The social constructivism paradigm provided the foundation for the research on instructional leadership, superintendent evaluation, and evaluator feedback. Social constructivism is based on the concept of finding multiple meanings of objects or events in the world; the meanings are broad and found within the contributions of the participants. The emphasis of social constructivism is on the process, the relationships, and the context (Creswell, 2007). The IPA approach provided a framework for investigating the school superintendents’ experiences of the development of instructional leadership, the evaluation process, and the evaluator feedback that can promote instructional leadership.

**Research Tradition**

The IPA approach was selected for the proposed body of research. This tradition, rooted in
psychological research, examined experiences in this study. The researcher, for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, interpreted the experiences. Thus, the IPA approach examined a specific phenomenon and shared the insights of the participants. Further, the individuals interpreted their experiences through reflections on their importance. The researcher then examined the details and made sense of them. This cycle of examination, reflection, and interpretation of a specific case characterizes the IPA approach as ideographic and hermeneutic (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This research explored the phenomenon of feedback within the school superintendent evaluation process that facilitates the growth of instructional leadership and promotes student achievement. The researcher examined the experiences, perceptions, and reflections of the superintendents to understand their development as instructional leaders, their evaluation process, and the feedback they received.

The IPA approach is influenced by three main factors: (a) phenomenology, (b) hermeneutics, and (c) idiography. Phenomenology explores experiences from a philosophically in order to describe and comprehend them. The study of phenomenology draws from the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. Of these, Husserl explored experiences and perceptions and these elements were used to ground the body of research. Hermeneutics is known as the theory of interpretation. Major theorists in this area are Schleiermacher, Heidegger, and Gadamer. The hermeneutic circle occurred as the researcher made sense of the experiences of others as they made sense of the phenomenon. Finally, idiography examines the particular or the specifics of the individual cases; it involves the analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

The IPA approach was used to explore the superintendent as an instructional leader and the connection to the evaluation process and evaluator feedback that leads to growth in this area. The study was idiographic as individual cases were shared. The superintendents examined their
experiences according to the work of Husserl. The hermeneutic circle was used as the researcher drew conclusions about instructional leadership, the evaluation process, and feedback from the perceptions of the superintendents. Further, the participants shared their perceptions of their experiences through reflection (Smith et al., 2009).

The work of Husserl provided the basis of the IPA research tradition for the current study (Smith et al., 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), the establishing principle of phenomenology shares the experiences as they naturally occur. Husserl believed phenomenology requires a “careful examination of human experience” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 12). How can individuals find meaning of their experiences? Answering this question led to recognition of the essential elements of the experience. This resulted in transience of the experience. The transcendence further explained the experiences and was then used to better understand those experiences. Husserl believed it is essential to look at the specifics of items and bring into consciousness the items as they are and not attempt to fit them into existing categories. Husserl used the term natural attitude to refer to those experiences that are more common. Instead, a phenomenological attitude is necessary to examine one’s understanding of an activity. This occurs as individuals separate from the action and then reflect (Smith et al., 2009).

For this research, school superintendents sought to explore the central aspects of their role as an instructional leader, their evaluation process, and the feedback received. Transcendence occurred and thoughts were shared. Through this research, superintendents reflected on their evaluations and the feedback they received. The participants then identified those elements that led to the development of their skills as instructional leaders. This brought their work, the evaluation process, and the feedback into consciousness where it was examined instead of fitting the components into existing structures assumed to be beneficial to their growth. Hence, the
superintendents adopted a phenomenological attitude through reflection.

Husserl’s theory provided further insights into the examination process. According to Smith et al. (2009), intentionality refers to the relationship between that which one is aware of and the activity. Husserl created a phenomenological method to focus on experiences. In order to focus more fully on the experience, bracketing was used. In this strategy, the focus was on the understanding one had for the activity. Husserl viewed bracketing as a removal or separation. The activity was then analyzed through reductions. This occurred as the phenomenology was examined and reflected upon; the participants then refocused and reanalyzed the activity anew. Thus, the true substance of the experience was revealed. A sequence of reductions occurred as the superintendents explored the activity and separated it from current perceptions. This led to revealing the true essence of the experience. Reflection was used to describe the experience. There are two types of reductions: eidetic and transcendental. Eidetic reductions were used to complete the process outlined above. Transcendental reductions occur as the root of understanding is examined; the underlying meaning of the experience is explored. Finally, Husserl’s philosophical work focuses on the act of reflecting about experiences; this involves a deep introspection of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). It is this deep act of reflection, bracketing, and reductions that were used to examine instructional leadership, the evaluation process, and the evaluator feedback that can promote professional growth and, in turn, increase student achievement.

Participants

This body of research considered the IPA approach and the exploration into instructional leadership, superintendent evaluation, and feedback to select participants. According to Creswell (2007), sampling is an important aspect of the design, as this must be consistent with the approach
and the research question. Four factors were considered: (a) purposeful sampling, (b) criterion-based sampling, (c) homogeneity of the participants, and (d) maximum variation.

Within the IPA tradition, the researcher obtained explanations of the participants’ experiences that were rich and comprehensive. Therefore, a purposeful, homogenous sample was used for the research. This was achieved through purposeful sampling, as investigating experiences cannot be random (Smith et al., 2009). Within this sampling process, the participants have a purpose and can provide insight into the specific problem (Creswell, 2007). Sampling was criterion-based, as individuals met the conditions outlined within the research design. Homogeneity focused on the state the participants serve in as superintendents. All participants needed to be currently serving as a superintendent in New Hampshire or be recently retired within five years. Further, maximum variation was employed to discover differences and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This strategy further confirmed the data. Thus, participants were selected based on differences in years of service, school district size, gender, experiences, and backgrounds. To meet the criteria, male and female superintendents with a variety of experiences were selected.

According to Smith et al. (2009), most bodies of IPA research consist of small homogeneous sample sizes with a one-time collection of data. The sample size depends upon the cases and the constraints, as the researcher aims for quality over quantity of the data. A small sample size of three to six homogeneous participants is recommended. However, doctoral-level work calls for a larger sample size (Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the sample size consisted of eight New Hampshire superintendents.

Smith et al. (2009) provide guidelines on selecting a sample. As noted, New Hampshire as the state of employment defined the homogeneity of the sample. Specific questions were
considered when selecting a homogeneous sample with maximum variation. Where have the participants worked? How do the participants vary? What is the gender of the participants? Thus, participants had to be school superintendents in New Hampshire who have worked as superintendents in two or more districts. Superintendents from multiple districts were able to provide a comparison of evaluation procedures and experiences with differing school board members who have provided them with feedback. Finally, the sample was found through the researcher’s own contacts and snowball sampling. Snowballing occurred as one participant suggested another participant for the study (Smith et al., 2009).

**Recruitment and Access**

Participants were recruited through the researcher’s existing school contacts. Superintendents were invited to participate in the study. A recruitment letter from the researcher was sent to each potential participant. This letter identified the researcher, work to be conducted, study methodology, purpose, and expected use of the results. The confidentiality of the participants was assured. All documents were kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage. The superintendents reviewed the information and provided consent to participate in the study. Thus, individuals knowingly participated in the study, which involved the solicitation through an introduction letter (see Appendix A). Approval was sought through the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The protection of human rights was also assured.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Smith et al. (2009) provide ethical considerations for an IPA study. It was essential that no harm came to the participants, consent was gained, raw data was kept confidential, confidentiality was assured, and data was reviewed. The participants were also provided the opportunity to withdraw from the study (Smith et
Data Collection

The data collection process aligned with the focus of the research question and the IPA approach. According to Smith et al. (2009), “IPA is a creative process” (p. 184) that examines experiences to find shared significance among them (Smith et al., 2009). The experiences are stories (Smith et al., 2009) that provide an in-depth, firsthand explanation of the thoughts superintendents have about their development of instructional leadership, their evaluation process, and the feedback they received that contributed to their professional growth.

Based on the work of Rubin and Rubin (2012), data were collected through responsive interviewing that consisted of one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions. The responsive interview assisted the interviewees to build a connection with the interviewer and share their experiences through a conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews allowed the participants to tell their stories openly. The participants were reflective about their experiences. This provided the researcher with the rich data that was needed. Rich is a subjective term. Therefore, it was essential for the researcher to remain neutral throughout the process. The researcher also assumed other qualities—unbiased, flexible, and patient, to name a few (Smith et al., 2009). Hence, it was important that the researcher did not become overwhelmed with the amount of data that was gathered. (Smith et al., 2009).

The interview format consisted of three sessions. In Session 1, specific demographic information was collected and informed consent for participation in the research was gained. This lasted approximately 20 minutes. Session 2 consisted of a conversation using the research question as a central focus. This lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Session 3 involved a member-checking
interview and follow-up questions were asked. This lasted between 15 to 60 minutes depending upon other data that were needed.

In accordance with Smith et al. (2009), interviews that are structured should be avoided and the questions should not be guided by theories. Thus, a questionnaire was avoided and semi-structured questions were used to guide the process (see Appendix C). However, it was important to ensure the research question was answered. Therefore, objectives guided the questioning sessions. The interviews were one-on-one in order to provide time for participant reflection (Smith et al., 2009). Open-ended questions were used first to build a connection and facilitate an open atmosphere (Creswell, 2007). The researcher modified the questions as the interviews advanced. Through this process the researcher developed a relationship with the participants. The progression facilitated reflection, was meaningful, and created dialogue (Smith et al., 2009). Here, the superintendents reflected on their development of instructional leadership through the evaluation process and the feedback they received.

Creswell (2011) provides additional considerations for interviews that were incorporated into the process. Probing questions were used to gain additional responses or make clear information as needed. The interviewer listened to the responses and avoided speaking more than the participants. The interview sessions remained focused on the topic. The researcher avoided judgment. Finally, the participants were asked if they had any questions for the researcher and were told they would receive a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy and additional feedback. The participants were then thanked and the session was concluded.

Individual interviews were scheduled with each participant. The participants determined the time and day of the sessions; the interviews took place at a location designated by the superintendents. The specific locations were private as confidentiality and limited interruptions
were necessary. An overview of the interview process was provided and the protocol established with each participant. The researcher conducted each interview session and took notes. The sessions were recorded using an iPhone and the audio recording application (Rev.com) to ensure accuracy of transcription. The researcher gained permission from the individuals to complete the interviews and audio record the sessions; the IRB consent form was reviewed and signed by the participants. Each interview session was recorded separately. The recordings were labeled with the pseudonym and session number, saved, and sent for transcription to Rev.com.

A summary of the specific data collection steps is outlined here. First, IRB approval for the proposed research was obtained. Second, school superintendents meeting the criterion sampling strategy were identified. Third, potential participants were sent a letter introducing the researcher, proposed study, and use of results. Fourth, final participants were provided with the IRB consent form. Fifth, the actual data collection began by accessing, copying, labeling, organizing, and filing the identified forms of documentation, archival records, and physical artifacts. Session 1 focused on demographic information. Session 2 focused on the interview questions. Interviews were transcribed. A transcription service (Rev.com) was procured to complete this step in the process. The transcribed data were reviewed by the researcher for accuracy and formatted for note taking and reflections. Sixth, the participants reviewed the transcribed interviews and coded themes. This information was discussed further during Session 3 as member checking occurred. Seventh, formal thank you letters were mailed to each participant. Finally, the data collection was organized and properly stored.

Data Storage

Due to the complexity and amount of the data in a qualitative study, data management was critical to the successful analysis of the information (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Both hard and
electronic copies of the data were stored in files. The data were organized according to participant (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Any documents for specific participants were labeled using the individual’s pseudonym (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H). Thus, a single file created an in-depth pictorial of one element of data collection. This enhanced the level of data collection as a whole group.

Upon receipt of the transcripts, documents were arranged to aid in the organization process and to allow for note taking and reflections. Transcribed interviews were formatted with margins for preliminary codes, emerging themes, and notes. This allowed for repeated review and reanalysis of the data. A codebook was created in paper form to note themes. All information was then filed accordingly and securely stored.

General information and documentation for the study was stored in files. A matrix was created using an Excel spreadsheet to record and track all research materials. This document contained the participant names, assigned pseudonyms, contact information, forms of data, access dates, and notes. The matrix was stored electronically. Space in the researcher’s home office was set aside for all materials related to the research study in a locked file cabinet. No other individuals were able to access the stored information besides the researcher. Thus, a thorough plan for data organization and storage was developed and implemented.

**Data Analysis**

The IPA approach facilitated an analysis that was methodical and qualitative and that resulted in a narrative. This approach focused on the experiences of the participants. The researcher was important within the analysis as meaning was found within the data (Smith et al., 2009). In general, the data analysis involved preparing and arranging data through coding to reveal themes that emerged. The data were then presented and interpreted (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) describes data analysis as being cyclical in nature where the researcher begins with an array
of collected information and ends with a story. The analysis provided a thorough case description. This involved three main functions that occurred simultaneously and throughout the process—the researcher continuously rearranged the data, displayed the data, and drew conclusions (Cresswell, 2007).

Data interpretation was critical to the analysis process. This occurred as the researcher found meaning and developed an understanding of the shared experiences. Here, the search was on the superintendent as an instructional leader, the evaluation process, and evaluator feedback. Smith et al. (2009) provide an analysis of the data in six steps: (a) reading and re-reading, (b) initial noting, (c) developing emergent themes, (d) searching for connections across emergent themes, (e) moving to the next case, and (f) looking for patterns across cases. Further, the six steps were followed for each case (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 1: Reading and Re-Reading (Smith et al., 2009) involved the initial and subsequent reviews of the original data. Here, the researcher used the audio recordings. As a result, the participant’s voice was kept at the center of the work. The researcher took the needed time during this stage of the analysis to be thorough. The data remained central to the process as the researcher actively engaged in the analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 2: Initial Noting (Smith et al., 2009) was the most comprehensive and time intensive part of the analysis. Here, the words and how they used were examined; this was considered the investigative level of the analysis. The researcher became acquainted with the transcript. This stage in the process was not governed by strict guidelines or rules; there were no specified actions. The goal was to create extensive notes and remarks about the data, to become involved with the data, and to draw conclusions. Hence, the analysis was closed; the focus was phenomenal and the notes were interpreted (Smith et al., 2009).
At this stage, the noting was exploratory and completed as follows. All comments were kept on the same transcript in order to see the relationships among them. Varying colored pens were used to highlight the differences. The paper copy of the transcript had broad margins on each side. The left margin contained preliminary comments and notes. The right margin noted themes that emerged throughout the process (Smith et al., 2009).

Using Smith et al.’s (2009) steps to guide the process, three types of comments were used during the noting stage: (a) descriptive, (b) linguistic, and (c) conceptual. Descriptive comments were used in context; as they were found in the data, they were noted in pink. Here, key words and phrases were identified that focused on the experiences and relationships of the participants. Linguistic comments examined how words were used within the interviews. This was noted in blue. Here, tone, sarcasm and emphasis were noted. Conceptual comments were explanatory and noted in purple. The coding was conceptual and the form became inquisitive. This phase was time-consuming as reflection and discussion were present. The participants’ predominant views were examined. The researcher examined individual experiences. During this work, highlighting was used to note important comments and data were broken down and pulled apart. This allowed the researcher to interact with the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 3: Developing Emergent Themes (Smith et al., 2009) involved an investigation of the overall data. The main purpose of this step was to examine the notes to find themes. The themes were communicated in phrases. The goal was to analyze the details while keeping the complex nature of the information central to the process. The initial notes were reviewed over the actual transcripts. The exploratory comments were examined for themes. The hermeneutic circle dictated this progression as the analysis examined the overall process and the parts of the transcript. The
parts were interpreted as they related to the whole and the whole as it related to the parts. Here, the participants’ thoughts and the researcher’s analysis were uncovered (Smith et al., 2009).

In Step 4: Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes (Smith et al., 2009), the themes were organized to reveal the interesting concepts. First, the themes were listed in the order they occurred within the interviews. Next, the items were cut and then physically grouped into like themes. Then, the themes were reorganized as needed and regrouped. Finally, consistencies were identified. This information was displayed in table form to depict the relationships of the themes. The patterns were then analyzed first by abstraction, and then to subsumption. Abstraction occurred as patterns were revealed among themes to create super-ordinate themes. These were like themes grouped together and renamed. Subsumption occurred as one theme formed other themes. This provided a deeper understanding of the data. Notes were written within each stage of the analysis. A visual representation of the data in this form was created, as well as a separate table for each theme (Smith et al., 2009).

In Step 5: Moving to the Next Case (Smith et al., 2009), the analysis continued to the next case and the researcher viewed each one as separate from the others. The subsequent cases were considered separately. The researcher developed new themes during this stage of the analysis and confirmed current themes (Smith et al., 2009).

In Step 6: Looking for New Patterns across Cases (Smith et al., 2009), connections were sought within the evident themes. The themes were reorganized with new labels. Tables were created to show the connections of themes within super-ordinate themes (Smith et al., 2009).

It is important to note that the above process involved the researcher seeking different levels of interpretation. Indeed, IPA is a long process; the researcher stayed focused on the results. The coding process involved identifying themes (Smith et al., 2009). Further, the researcher
completed each step to find themes focused on instructional leadership, the superintendent evaluation process, and evaluator feedback. These themes shed light on the experiences of superintendents with their evaluation and the feedback they receive that promotes instructional leadership and increases student achievement. The focus was on the language that is used within the process and the language the superintendents used to explore the phenomenon.

The six steps presented by Smith et al. (2009) were used to complete the data analysis. Other considerations were made to ensure the process was thorough and valid. Miles and Huberman (1994) provided initial steps to data analysis. Contact and document summary forms were created and used to note occurrences and later used for coding. Summaries were created from field notes. Data were organized, reviewed, and arranged according to participant (documents, field notes, summary forms, transcribed interviews), and files were created (Creswell, 2007).

**Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2007) provides standards to ensure the quality of IPA research. These concepts are focused on the actions of the researcher and embedded in the current study. The researcher understood the foundation of phenomenology, conveyed the phenomenon clearly, analyzed data in accordance with an IPA study, described the experience, and reflected during the research and analysis. Further, Creswell (2007) outlines several strategies to promote validation within qualitative research: (a) prolonged engagement; (b) triangulation; (c) clarification of researcher bias; (d) member checking; (e) rich, thick traditions; and (f) an external audit.

Prolonged engagement was accomplished as the researcher built a relationship with the superintendents. This was facilitated through the researcher’s current understanding of the culture of New Hampshire school districts and her work within them. Relationships were also fostered during Session 1 of the interview process. Triangulation was achieved as the researcher shared the
themes that arose in each interview. Member checking was incorporated into the data collection and the analysis process as participants clarified their statements and provided further reflections on their experiences. This occurred as the school superintendents involved in the study were asked to review the findings and interpretations. The researcher incorporated rich, thick descriptions of the participants’ experiences into the data analysis process. Finally, an individual not involved in the research completed an external audit. Yin (as cited in Smith et al., 2009) believes an independent audit of the data helps to ensure validity. In this audit, a school board chairperson followed the researcher’s steps from the beginning of the process to the end.

Internal validity was upheld through several strategies. First, the researcher reduced personal bias through substantive validation. Here, reflection was used to further understand the work (Creswell, 2007) and conclusions were drawn after thorough review of the data. As suggested by Maxwell (2013), the researcher kept a journal throughout the process. Next, purposeful sampling was used to omit any participants who did not meet the established criteria. All individuals participating in the research were school superintendents from New Hampshire, having worked in at least two different school districts. Finally, all interviews took place privately and the participants determined the location. This helped to ensure confidentiality and provided conditions for participants to respond honestly. Thus, strategies to increase validity were built into the research design and upheld throughout data collection and analysis.
CHAPTER 4—FINDINGS

The superintendent serves as the chief instructional leader of a school district (Graham et al., 2015); student achievement is at the center of their work (Forner et al., 2012; Moffett, 2011; Spanneut et al., 2011; Whitt et al., 2015). The school board is primarily responsible for oversight of the superintendent and is mandated to complete an annual performance review (Christina, 2012; Graham et al., 2015). The appraisal includes feedback to the superintendent in various areas, one being instructional leadership (Christina, 2012). However, school board members bring a variety of experiences and levels of knowledge about education to the evaluation and procedures vary across districts; there are inconsistencies within the process. Further, the feedback provided can have little meaning to the superintendent (Dipaola, 2010); yet, it is a critical component of the process (Christina, 2012).

The purpose of this IPA study framed in cultural-historical activity theory was to explore the experiences of eight New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and feedback that promotes instructional leadership. Participants represented a variety of educational experiences and had worked in at least two school districts. The central phenomenon was the feedback used within the evaluation and is generally defined as those elements of the process that promote instructional leadership.

A closer look at the superintendent as an instructional leader, the evaluation, and the feedback received can bring clarity to this process and work to promote student achievement. The central research question of the current research is: What are the experiences of New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and how do they make sense of these experiences as it relates to feedback that promotes instructional leadership and increases student achievement?
Participants

Eight New Hampshire school superintendents, from various regions of the state, participated in the study. The participants, both male and female, ranged in years of service as a superintendent from under five to over 30 years. All superintendents had worked in more than one school district and had been involved in a variety of educational contexts, such as assistant superintendent, curriculum work, Department of Education, and classroom teaching. These superintendents led school districts with student enrollment ranging from just over 1,000 students to over 4,000 students in grades preschool to 12. The districts are comprised of one town to multiple towns.

Superintendent A was recently retired with over 30 years experience as a superintendent in multiple school districts ranging in size from approximately 2,800 students to over 4,000 students. Superintendent B had over 10 years experience as a superintendent in a district with a student population of over 1,000. Superintendent C had fewer than five years experience as a superintendent in one school district with student enrollment over 2,500. Superintendent D also had fewer than five years experience in the position in one school district with a student population of over 4,000. Superintendent E had been a superintendent for over five years and oversaw a student population of approximately 4,000 students. Superintendent F had worked as a superintendent for over 25 years in multiple districts with a current student enrollment of over 4,000 students. Superintendent G had been a superintendent for over 10 years in multiple districts with student populations ranging from approximately 1,500 to over 3,500. Finally, Superintendent H had served as a superintendent for over 30 years in multiple districts, and served a student population of over 2,000 at the time of this study. Thus, the participants brought a multitude of experiences and situations to this research.
The Emergence of Super-Ordinate Themes

An investigation into the experiences of superintendents with their evaluations provided insight into the connections of this process to the development of instructional leadership and the promotion of student achievement within school districts in New Hampshire. Four super-ordinate themes emerged upon analysis: (a) the superintendent as an instructional leader, (b) the superintendent evaluation process, (c) feedback for instructional leadership, and (d) influences on the evaluation process and growth of instructional leadership (see Table 1). It is first important to define and explore the superintendent as an instructional leader.

The Superintendent as an Instructional Leader

Superintendents hold a distinctive position within a school district. As district leaders, superintendents have a unique perspective of all aspects of the system. It was found that the position is a complex one with numerous responsibilities. As the head of the district, superintendents are instructional leaders. Instructional leaders have a firm understanding of teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment. They are able to lead and support others in the planning and implementation of district initiatives in order to promote student achievement. Their work must be intentional in order to promote student achievement. Thus, they are agents of change. Six themes emerged upon investigation: (a) place and purpose within the system, (b) fostering a collaborative team approach, (c) supporting instructional efforts, (d) creating and implementing a vision, (e) the superintendent as a reflective practitioner, (f) fostering professional growth, and (g) confidence in abilities (see Table 2).

Place and purpose within the system. The superintendent has a definite place and purpose within the system. Superintendents work within a system and work to develop and mold that system. The school board manages the superintendent. The superintendent, in turn, oversees
Table 1

**Super-Ordinate Themes and Subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Superintendent as Instructional Leader</th>
<th>The Superintendent Evaluation Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Place and purpose within the system</td>
<td>• Characteristics of the superintendent evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fostering a collaborative team approach</td>
<td>• Functions of the superintendent evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supporting instructional efforts</td>
<td>• Connections to instructional leadership and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creating and implementing a vision</td>
<td>• Areas to consider within the superintendent evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The superintendent as reflective practitioner</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fostering professional growth</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Confidence in abilities</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feedback for Instructional Leadership</th>
<th>Influences on the Evaluation Process &amp; the Growth of Instructional Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Functions of feedback specific to instructional leadership</td>
<td>• Relationship between the superintendent and school board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Qualities of feedback that promote instructional leadership</td>
<td>• School board qualities that promote student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Using ratings and scores</td>
<td>• Community connections to student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feedback needs of the superintendent</td>
<td>• Accountability of the superintendent and school board</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

**The Superintendent as Instructional Leader**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place and Purpose Within the System</th>
<th>Fostering a Collaborative Team Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A system guided by process</td>
<td>• Implementing the team approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positioned for leadership</td>
<td>• Supporting the leadership team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negotiating the politics of the system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting the goals of the strategic plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bringing consistency and balance to all levels of the system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changing role of the instructional leader</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting Instructional Efforts</th>
<th>Creating and Implementing a Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Providing focused opportunities and time</td>
<td>• Moving the system forward through planning and reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Securing resources for teaching and learning</td>
<td>• Envisioning the big picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creating an environment for teaching and learning</td>
<td>• A focus on student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Moving from vision to reality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent as Reflective Practitioner</th>
<th>Fostering Professional Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Planning, implementing, and revising</td>
<td>• Staying current in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mindful, thoughtful, and intentional work</td>
<td>• Understanding the need for professional development</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Confidence in Abilities</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidence in instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Internal drive of the instructional leader</td>
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</table>
all operations of the school district. There are many people or positions that function within the system and all have a specific role—school board members, administrators, teachers, staff, families, community members, and students. The system is a complex one guided by processes, led by a superintendent, political in nature, focused on a strategic plan and goals, and needing consistency and balance. Also, the superintendency has changed over time to meet new educational demands.

A system guided by process. Superintendent F shared a specific process of working with a strategic plan, goal setting, and evaluation: “What we have is a rolling strategic plan. Each year we update it and stuff will drop off, and add on, and that kind of business… that kind of generates what some of the goals will be for next year.” Superintendent C further reflected on the importance of goals within a system:

Hey, everybody's got to have a goal. Every team has to get together on a goal, we're not going to tell you what that goal is but that's where your flexibility is, but we're solid on everybody's got to have a goal that's focused on student learning.

Processes direct the system and affect the work of the superintendent. In most systems, school boards and district personnel work to create a strategic plan. The strategic plan guides the district in its operations and, ultimately, fosters student achievement. From the strategic plan, goals are formed. These goals are determined by the school board and implemented through the efforts of the superintendent and school district staff. It was revealed, through the interview process, that the system affects the superintendent’s role as an instructional leader.

Positioned for leadership. Superintendent H interpreted the superintendent’s role as “a pretty important one, because the superintendent can shut or open doors. It’s a pretty powerful position.” Superintendent E further explored this: “As the superintendent, I am the CEO of all of
my departments,” and then later stated, “…the sole responsibility rests with me as the superintendent.” Superintendent B offered a powerful reflection: “It’s a lonely position.” Thus, superintendents described their position in a variety of ways.

It is evident that superintendents are able to grasp the importance of their position within the system and identify themselves as leaders. The position is like no other within the system, but this uniqueness and influence allows them the opportunity to initiate efforts that build the system in the area of teaching and learning. However, the system has elements that affect the work of the instructional leader.

**Negotiating the politics of the system.** The superintendency is a political position as shared by Superintendent F:

Superintendency is not an elected position, but it is a political position… you've got to look at it as politics being positive. Politics is the art of making things work, that's your job.

When you wash everything away, your job is to make things work.

In order to work effectively within the system, to promote student achievement, the superintendent must assume many roles. The politics of the role can be challenging. It is this element that can also facilitate the growth of the organization in the area of student achievement; however, these skills need to be developed. There must be a focus on the goals of the system for this to occur successfully.

**Meeting the goals of the strategic plan.** Superintendent B shared, “The goals are critically important. I think they set the tone. They set the stage. They set the parameters, whatever word you want to use, for the district.” This is further explored by Superintendent H who compared goals to a balancing act: “Goals are like the plates and you have to keep these plates going, but some of those plates you have to take down and actually implement before they fall or people lose interest.”
Superintendent C examined the connection to district initiatives: “The other piece in my position in particular is trying to connect school board goals and initiatives with what we're saying district wide, in ways that help feed both.” Finally, Superintendent D, through reflection about district goals, attached emotion to the work: “This is something I'm proud of... [The goals] are all written in the language of student performance and goals at a macro level of student improvement....”

Thus, superintendents reflect and find meaning in their work; accomplishing the goals of the system that lead to student success is critical.

The superintendent assumes the role of chief instructional leader in order to effectively accomplish district goals and promote student achievement. The system makes clear its priorities. In most school districts, goals are generated from the strategic plan. The goals are primarily written and adopted by the school board. The superintendent is then responsible for achieving those goals. Goals can be based on all areas of the organization.

**Bringing consistency and balance to all levels of the system.** According to Superintendent C, “We can help in ways that guide folks around some, what you might call, loose or tight guidance around [goals]....” It is clear; the work of the superintendent begins with the goals. Further, all parts of the system are affected by the goals. Superintendent E shared:

If I'm not ensuring that everyone is implementing their piece of the pie, and that has to be done with fidelity. If I chose not to be hands on I could ensure fidelity and for me I want to be part of the process so I can ensure that...

The superintendent brings consistency and balance to the system. The position must work effectively with all levels of the system—school personnel, the school board, and the community. This is evident as Superintendent H used the simile of the plates, as shared above. The superintendency is a balancing act. The chief educational officer oversees all levels of the district
and must balance the needs of these levels while focusing on district priorities. In turn, this drives the work of the system—the goals—forward. Thus, the superintendent works to improve student achievement as an instructional leader. Moreover, this instructional leadership role is not static.

**Changing role of the instructional leader.** Superintendent B reflects, “…but I have seen a big change in the role in terms of curriculum, instruction, assessment, accountability, making sure all of those systems are working….,” Superintendent H shared, “Generally superintendents don't write curriculum, they usually set up the conditions for the curriculum to be written or to be enhanced.” Finally, Superintendent F examined this role in relation to others:

> How do you use your people's strength to get where you want? Nobody has all the skills. It goes back again to team concept, who's best to work on this? Who's got the best skills to do this, etcetera, etcetera?

The idea of the superintendent as an instructional leader is a developing one in the educational system. As school districts struggle with an increased emphasis on accountability, the concept of a chief instructional leader to support teaching and learning becomes more important. Superintendent B makes clear the change in the role of the superintendent. As these elements become part of the position, superintendents work to foster student success. This work must begin with the superintendent who needs to possess the necessary leadership skills to facilitate this growth within the system. Yet, this cannot be achieved in isolation.

**Fostering a collaborative team approach.** Superintendent E explored the structure of the school district and the need to work with others:

> I have an assistant superintendent. I don't have building level curriculum coordinators but with my assistant superintendent with assigning those roles and us moving forward it's all driven from a strategic plan… I have someone who oversees curriculum, assessment
and instruction but I oversee that person as well.

Superintendent C shared, “We've spent a good deal of time building our own how we work together, our collaborative structures.” Superintendent F examines further:

I think what helps to lead for a successful organization is, it's all with the time, everybody is depending upon everybody else. People have accepted ownership for it. It's just stronger that way. Everybody in turn has a certain element of responsibility or obligation for everybody else's growth, that way it becomes successful. It's a joint venture.

Goals cannot be accomplished through the work of the superintendent alone. The system is a collaborative structure. Superintendents, as instructional leaders, understand the importance of collaboration. It is the work of others that moves the district forward. Instructional leadership means the superintendent designates responsibility to others on the team. There is a focus on the strategic plan and goals. It is important to note; the superintendent stays connected to the work. However in this case, it would be essential to develop an effective team.

**Implementing the team approach.** Superintendent E reflected:

No we plan as a team, as a leadership team, based on what a plan is. I involve my entire leadership team with that and we all have our roles in it at the building level. The teachers know their role with instruction; the principal’s role with instructional leadership; and my superintendent with instructional leadership around that.

Superintendent B explored this concept as an instructional leader:

Right, right, it's the relationship. I don't want to be in a position of power. I do not want to be. I want to empower the employees. I've always felt strongly about that and when there's accomplishments, it's because the people did it…

Superintendent F examined this further:
The way you do that is, you get people trying to work together in concert, and having
developed ownership stuff… Everybody's got skin in the game, that's the only way you
make progress. Everybody's going to have skin in the game.

Here, the superintendents used key terms to emphasize the team approach: *relationship*,
*empower*, *work together*, and *ownership*. It is the team that accomplishes the goals under the
leadership of the superintendent. Superintendent C emphasized this. The final statement by
Superintendent F, “Everybody’s going to have skin in the game,” hinted to the importance of the
team approach. As evidenced above, there is a team approach to leadership and joint ownership of
the work. This empowers the team. Further, superintendents emphasized the role of the leadership
team within the district to promote student achievement.

**Supporting the leadership team.** Superintendent E shared:

For me I'm the ultimate instructional leadership person here… being that 911… making
sure that my assistant superintendent is equipped to provide them the resources, the
support, and the training, and to keep that all grounded together so that they can ensure
instructional leadership at a high level in their schools.

And examined further by Superintendent F:

It's saying, Okay, here's the direction we are going, here's the goals that we have, what do
you need in the way of support? What do you need in the way of training and allowing
them to do their work.

It is critical that the superintendent supports the leadership team. The leadership team is
generally comprised of school district administrators—assistant superintendents, curriculum
coordinators, directors, deans, and principals. The connection to the superintendent as an
instructional leader is made clearer. The superintendent is the “ultimate instructional leader,” as
noted by Superintendent E. This role is taken very seriously by superintendents as demonstrated by Superintendent E’s point of “being that 911.” This demonstrates a supportive environment set by Superintendent E. Superintendent F hinted to the importance of the relationship with the leadership team; this is a relationship built on trust. Thus, the complex role of the superintendent as an instructional leader within the system is established, and the superintendent and administrators can now focus on student success.

**Supporting instructional efforts.** In order to move the system forward, superintendents that are instructional leaders work to ensure support for effective teaching and learning practices. This support can be in many forms. It became apparent, through the superintendent as an instructional leader, that academic achievement is supported through opportunities, time, resources, and an environment conducive to growth.

**Providing focused opportunities and time.** Superintendent F explored the role of the superintendent:

I don't necessarily know nor do I need to know all of those details that make that happen but the reason I need to know that is out of respect for the person doing that work, and what I need to do to support them.

Superintendent C shared, “From my perspective when I look at the central office positions I think we can help in ways that help keep sacred time for that work.” Superintendent F further reflected, “You try and provide them with the time, the opportunity, the resources.”

The superintendent facilitates and supports the work of the leadership team and teachers by providing opportunities and time. Superintendent C understood the value of time to plan and implement initiatives. The work is goal oriented and the team approach is evident. Moreover, the role of the superintendent, as an instructional leader, consists of providing opportunities to others
in the areas of teaching and learning. Resources are needed for success of these initiatives.

**Securing resources for teaching and learning.** Superintendent E examined this aspect of the superintendent’s role: “Like I tell the principals, ‘You worry about getting it done, I'll broker the resources.’” Superintendent F did this through the school board. He shared, “Me working with my school board to ensure that they're knowledgeable so that they can make goals, and so that they're knowledgeable so they can understand the state of their schools, where are we achieving.”

Effective programming and attainment of goals cannot be accomplished without the necessary resources. As an instructional leader, the superintendent must create the means for the resources to be secured. As Superintendent E indicated, the role of “broker” is assumed to function within the system to secure the needed resources. Thus, the superintendent works with the school board in order to accomplish this. This concept connects to the earlier discussion of the superintendent as an instructional leader who is positioned in the system to meet the goals of the strategic plan through the team approach. Along with the necessary resources, the right environment is also needed.

**Creating an environment for teaching and learning.** There are many elements to consider, as explored by Superintendent F:

What you want to create is an environment where people are willing to take risks, willing to learn from their mistakes… they're not going to take a chance on something. If you don't take a chance, you're not going to grow, you're not going to learn more.

Superintendent F continued and provided a summary of what is needed for advances in teaching and learning:

You've created a system where you've got on-going training, conversation, professional development, focused on improving instruction and curriculum for students…. It's very
difficult to create that environment with a school board and a superintendent, unless you've been there for a long time.

The environment within the system must be conducive to teaching and learning. This is established through the superintendent’s efforts as an instructional leader. In this role, the superintendent creates the physical environment within each school, but also ensures an atmosphere for risk taking. Superintendent F focused on the people within the system. The superintendent, as the chief instructional leader, can establish this environment and ensure its success. Further, all parts of the system must work towards the district goals of student achievement, including the school board. Hence, the superintendent is the central figure, the hub in the wheel. It has been established that the superintendent is the instructional leader within the system. In this role, the superintendent provides the necessary structure and support to promote student achievement. The system functions because of the superintendent, who creates and implements a vision for student achievement.

**Creating and implementing a vision.** As instructional leaders, superintendents have a vision for teaching and learning within their school districts. This vision advances the system through reflection and focuses on the big picture, becomes a reality, and is centered in student achievement.

**Moving the system forward through planning and reflection.** Superintendent H explored this concept: “I know what my needs are as I go forward, and what I want to improve based on conversations with principals and based on test results….” Superintendent C shared the visioning process further: “It’s both connecting all of that good work going on with a strategic focus over how we’re going to work together.” Superintendent F further reflected:
I believe the job as superintendent is to know where you want to be three or four years down the road. You've got to be ahead of everybody. Then, what you say is, Okay, if I want the district to be here, how do I work backwards to get us to that point?

Instructional leaders have a vision that moves the school district forward. Their vision is driven by the school district goals and a passion for student success. Reflection is central to the work. Thus, the district advances as a result of the superintendent’s work as an instructional leader, work based on planning and reflection. However, in order for this to occur, the superintendent must see the big picture.

**Envisioning the big picture.** Superintendent E examined big picture thinking:

And globally thinking, for me I see myself as a thinker. I think at the telescopic level that big umbrella and I bring my view down to the microscopic level in each of it but I start at the telescopic level because I'm about the big picture.

Superintendent E further reflected:

It's so important to go through whatever level you have set up for your structure with your leadership team, and then down to that building level, then down to that classroom level to be able to see the roots of all of that, how that grows.

The superintendent must think globally and account for all aspects of the system in order to move the district forward. Superintendent E provided a framework to better understand the visioning process of the superintendent as an instructional leader. The movement from the telescopic to microscopic levels demonstrates the superintendent’s strategy to begin with the big picture and work towards the small details through the comparison to roots and then move to implementation through actionable items. The end result can improve student achievement.

**A focus on student achievement.** Superintendent G shared:
We need to be an institution that addresses all the student needs and always asks, “What can we do better? How can we personalize education?” That seems to be the big theme, and, “Where's society going? Where's the 21st century going? How can we capture the interest and wake up that desire to be a lifelong learner in all the kids?”

Superintendent F reflected:

You really got to know where you want the district to go. Once you know that, what do you want to see in the way of instruction? What do you want to see in the way of curriculum, instructional strategies, programs, services.

Student achievement is at the center of the work of the superintendent. Through reflection, Superintendents G and F connected the vision of the superintendent to student achievement. Insights into the superintendent as a visionary instructional leader are revealed. The superintendents keep the student central to the vision. We see again the importance of the big picture in moving forward to enhance student achievement. Thus, superintendents look ahead and plan, use their leadership teams, see the big picture, question, and reflect. This continuous cycle enables the vision of the superintendent to become a reality.

Moving from vision to reality. Superintendent F reflected on moving from the conceptual to the actual:

How do you get people to think that it's their idea? What you've got to do is you've got to know where you want to be in three or four years. You've got to set the environment and create opportunities to allow that to happen. Then, you have to support it… you're making course corrections or adjustments.

Superintendent F provided concluding points about visionary work: “You're getting people to grow their skills towards the accomplishment of something that benefits the students and the school
district as a whole.”

As instructional leaders, superintendents make the vision become reality. The words of Superintendent F illustrated one superintendent’s thought process to accomplish the work of the system with a focus on student achievement. Common elements continue to emerge: (a) supportive environment, (b) intentional direction, (c) forward thinking, and (d) goal attainment. Thus, the work within the system connects to the vision of the superintendent and this can lead to increased student achievement. However, this cannot be effectively accomplished without ongoing reflection.

**The superintendent as a reflective practitioner.** The act of reflection emerged as a critical element of instructional leadership. Superintendents are continuously planning, implementing, and revising their vision. This is accomplished through reflection. Further, the work of the superintendent is mindful, thoughtful, and intentional.

**Planning, implementing and revising.** According to Superintendent E, “planning is an important part of the process.” Superintendent F reflected on this process: “Some things that you felt would be the greatest thing since sliced bread.... When you think back on it, you go, ‘Oh my God, what was I thinking? That was not a good idea.’ You make your adjustment.” Further, Superintendent G explored the questioning that is part of the planning, implementing, and revising process:

- What do the test results show us? What does the parent feedback show us? Do we provide kids with that opportunity to learn? Then, do we do it well? Let's rethink whether this is still valid. If it is, we keep it. If it's not, then let's find a better way.

Planning for student success is a critical component of instructional leadership. There emerges a continuous cycle of reflection that includes planning, implementing, and revising. This
provides an example of the superintendent as a reflective practitioner. The instructional leader who reflects, continuously questions and examines efforts. This advances the work of the superintendent and it is this work that is intentional.

**Mindful, thoughtful, and intentional work.** Superintendent G explored beliefs on education: “That's where I believe in education. Education takes time, and education needs to be getting to a better place than you were before….” This was examined in another light by Superintendent H: “So for me it's about how do I make sure that our students have the best footing for life after high school.” Superintendent B reflected on the role of instructional leader further: “I never want to be a barrier. I never want to be reason why the district doesn't move forward to meet the needs of kids and families. Why would I do that? Why would I do that to myself?”

Reflection is facilitated by the mindfulness and thoughtfulness of the superintendent. Superintendents have strong beliefs about educating students and their work is intentional. They continue to understand their importance within the system and the critical nature of their work with others. The work is achieved through the intentional act of planning, implementing, and revising that is completed through continuous questioning about all aspects of the teaching and learning process. However, a vision and reflection alone cannot enable superintendents to work as instructional leaders and promote student achievement. They must continue to grow professionally.

**Fostering professional growth.** Instructional leaders must have a deep understanding of teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment. This understanding is a constant process. Superintendents also reflect upon their growth needs as instructional leaders and there is a focus on their own learning as instructional leaders.

**Staying current in the field.** Superintendent A examined this need:

You need to make sure that you… understand the latest in terms of research in teaching
learning theory, and how kids learn, and if you understand that, then you're able to, I think, better able to deal with the entire concept of curriculum development and revision.

Superintendent shared another perspective:

I like to pick something every year or two, that seems to be of interest to me, a project or something, which then forces me to go out and research it, and practice it, and do it…. It keeps you alive. It keeps you focused.

In order to ensure success as an instructional leader, superintendents must remain current in the field and up-to-date on the latest research. The importance of research and learning theory is emphasized. Superintendents understand the need to develop professionally in order to grow as instructional leaders and meet the needs of the system. This growth can also occur through professional development.

**Understanding the need for professional development.** Superintendent F shared, “You pick up your professional development from a variety of places. Some of it is formal. Some of it is informal. You've got to do your reading. You go to workshops. You take courses.” Superintendent F continued, “You go back and you emerge yourself, whether it's schools, or facilities, or educational philosophy, or quality whatever the case may be. If you're active that way, it keeps you alive and going.”

Superintendents must seek out activities that will facilitate their advancement as instructional leaders. There are many options open to them, some formal and others informal. Superintendent F used “emerge yourself” to describe the professional development process. This phrase demonstrates the importance of this endeavor. It is all encompassing, meaningful, and important. Superintendents have the ability to identify their needs as instructional leaders. Throughout the interviews, the participants communicated confidence in their work.
Confidence in abilities. Yes, the growth of the superintendent can be facilitated through outside sources and professional development. However, the true development of instructional leadership is found within the individual. Superintendents believe that confidence in their abilities and their role as instructional leaders fosters their growth. To be effective instructional leaders, superintendents first need a firm understanding of teaching and learning.

Understanding teaching and learning. Superintendent A reflected, “First and foremost, if you're going to be an instructional leader from my perspective, you need to understand the teaching learning process.” Superintendent F shared, “Experience is a big help.”

The abilities of superintendents span a wide range of areas. There are some specific to instructional leadership. Superintendents must have a deep understanding of teaching and learning and a focus on curriculum and assessment. Thus, superintendents appreciate the need to be experts in the field. They then need to use this expertise to work with others, be confident in their abilities and in their role as instructional leaders, and model effective practices for others.

Confidence in instructional leadership. Superintendent H reflected:

I did sit with the teachers and build that… and literally got our hands dirty together, we built the PowerPoint together, we updated the research, and presented to the board, so sometimes I get to play in the sandbox, but mostly I'm just building sandboxes, helping people play.

Successful instructional leaders are self-assured in their own skills so they can guide teachers and administrators. Superintendent H discussed with confidence the ability to unite teachers, support them, and produce a product. There is excitement as the work is described. Further, it became evident that instructional leadership is developed through the internal motivation of the superintendent.
**Internal drive of the instructional leader.** Superintendent B explored: “It has to be self-motivation. I have to have the passion to do the work. I have to want to make it better for kids… It is a drive internally to make things better.” Superintendent E shared further insights:

You honestly have to be self-motivated…. You can't be the person who depends on a pat on the back. If that is what you need for motivation, you're not going to be happy or fulfilled because it has to be intrinsic.

Superintendents are driven in their work by self-motivation. Intrinsic motivation moves the superintendent forward as an instructional leader. It is from within that the will to succeed and ensure the accomplishments of their organizations exists. As Superintendent E discussed self-motivation, other factors emerged that affect the work of the superintendent. These factors are revealed when investigating the superintendent evaluation process. The question still remains. How does the superintendent evaluation affect the growth of instructional leadership?

**The Superintendent Evaluation Process**

The superintendent evaluation is a tool used to measure the performance of the head of a school district. The school board completes this task. Elements of the process may include: specific criteria, a scoring rubric, a narrative from the board, board comments, a superintendent self-reflection, a designated writer, meetings among school board members, meetings with the superintendent, and a specific timeline for completion. It is important to note, in the state of New Hampshire, individual school boards determine the process for their districts. It was found that there is no consistency across organizations. However, the NHSBA does provide suggestions on the criteria, components, and process. Some school districts have a policy that drives this activity. The experiences of superintendents with their evaluation process can be shared using four areas: (a) characteristics of the superintendent evaluation, (b) functions of the superintendent evaluation,
(c) connections to instructional leadership and growth, and (d) areas to consider within the superintendent evaluation (see Table 3).

**Characteristics of the superintendent evaluation.** The superintendent evaluation has specific characteristics. It is an activity that is complex, serious in nature, guided, and defined. The process is governed by policy and timelines. An understanding of the process must first be discussed.

**Overview of the process.** Superintendent F reflected on the evaluation:

In January… what I do is a self-evaluation…. The board agreed on this rubric and this format…. We have a meeting and we go over, “Okay, we thought you did a really good job here. We'd like to see you do some more here.”

Superintendent F shared further, “In essence, it's a kind of a goal setting kind of thing. Out of that, I would develop an actual plan, and what we've kind of done is try and integrate everybody's goal into the district's goals.”

The evaluation of the superintendent is a process. Although this process differs across school districts, the superintendents are aware of the steps that are followed that encompass their evaluation. Further, the evaluation process has many components. These components are directly related to the district strategic plan and goals.

Superintendent F discussed these essential elements of the evaluation process as the current practice is examined. There is a connection to the goals of the district. There is collaboration among the school board members. This establishes the connection between the superintendent evaluation and the superintendent as an instructional leader. Thus, the superintendent understands the nature of the evaluation and its place within the system. However, each system has its own structure.
Table 3

**The Superintendent Evaluation Process**

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*Nature and structure of the evaluation process.* Superintendent D shared, “You need some sort of guiding document.” Further, Superintendent G noted the use of timelines, “You always feel the timelines, no matter what you do with evaluation.” Superintendent H examined the evolution of the process: “The first year we all worked together, the policy, the adopted policy, and they struggled through it themselves…. You can see the first one has no educational leadership or relationship to the board, that kind of stuff.” Superintendent H then reflected on growth in the process:

They go back to see whether there's been any relationship to the strategic plan in these areas, and so they've become much more concrete and much more reflective of how we worked together for a year. It's been an interesting change.

As the superintendents reflected on their own evaluation processes, the components and procedures differed, but the common component of a tool for reflection was woven throughout the data. The importance of a structured process is revealed. The superintendent is able to understand, through policy and organization, the role of an instructional leader within the system. Support can also be found within the actual process or within the documents that are used. The structure should
meet the needs of the system and this is dependent on the school board that must collaborate to accomplish the task.

**Collaborative effort of the school board.** Superintendent H stated, “The chair, the vice chair will explain the whole process, explains it to the camera.” Superintendent F shared, “The board members all fill out the same document.” Superintendent B examined these efforts stating, “They take that tool. They work together and then they come back.”

The evaluation of the superintendent is a responsibility of the school board. The members collaborate throughout the process, as consensus among the individuals is needed. It is a collective work of the school board and the body directs the process with the chairperson of the board playing a major role. Thus, the chairperson is central to the superintendent evaluation. This position is seen as a form of support for the superintendent.

**Importance of the school board chairperson.** Superintendent B shared, “The chairman of the board comes back and gives me feedback.” Superintendent C also reflected on the importance of the chairperson: “I think one of the things that helped in terms of process was my chair was the conduit for everything.”

As discussed, the school board works as one body to complete the evaluation. This is evidenced as superintendents examined their processes and discussed the elements that comprise the activity. The school board chairperson was noted as a critical element of support and leadership. Thus, there is a need for the chairperson of the school board to have an understanding of the characteristics of the evaluation process in order for it to be successful. There is another element that contributes to the meaningfulness of the process, the superintendent’s view of it.

**Evaluation as one event.** According to Superintendent C, “Yeah, I think the evaluation instrument… through the conversation, seemed more like an event to me…. As an event, I thought
it was helpful.” The idea of the evaluation, as one event, was further explained by Superintendent G: “Evaluation is really just these dipsticks every year or every semester to see if you're still on the right track…. It’s a single event in February.”

The superintendent’s interpretation of the evaluation is critical to its ability to be a meaningful process that promotes development as an instructional leader. The evaluation of the superintendent is primarily viewed as a single event instead of an ongoing process facilitating growth. This is seen as the superintendents reflect on their evaluation process. Superintendents C and G were newer to the process of evaluation as a superintendent. Their development as top instructional leaders was forming. They were able to reflect on the role the evaluation has on their growth, and their experiences with the evaluation revealed the process is only one element in this growth. A central question now emerges. What part does the evaluation play in the development of instructional leadership? A look at the purpose of the evaluation begins to reveal the answer.

**Functions of the superintendent evaluation.** The evaluation of the superintendent has a variety of functions within the system. On the surface, the evaluation provides documentation of the superintendent’s performance, progress, and accountability. When looking more closely, the evaluation can inform the superintendent and the school board if the direction of the district aligns with that of the community. Also, the evaluation process facilitates discussion among school board members and with the superintendent. These actions can lead to the growth of the superintendent as an instructional leader.

**Performance, documentation, and accountability.** Superintendent B explored the use of the evaluation:

…buy a new refrigerator, it better be high performing. I just spent X amount. I think the communities feel that way. We're spending this amount of money, what kinds of, you
know, we need to have have [sic] some performance, some evaluation of that performance…

Superintendent B continued:

But it is the responsibility that you have and if things aren't going right and you get yourself into a mess, you have that documentation that says, “The point of it is you have a public servant. You have an obligation to that public servant, and you have a contract.”

The evaluation of the superintendent is a formal process and it is through this process that the performance of the superintendent is documented and a form of accountability is provided to the stakeholders of the system. The comparison of job performance to a refrigerator is an interesting one. This helps to better understand the conscious understanding of Superintendent B’s role and responsibility within the system. Superintendent B comprehended the importance of accountability and how this fit within the role of the superintendent. One component of the evaluation that is documented is instructional leadership. The superintendent, through the evaluation, is held accountable for the achievement of the students within the district. The evaluation can provide other insights to the superintendent, specifically if the work of the superintendent aligns with the expectations of the school board and the needs of the community.

*Superintendent’s fit within the system.* Superintendent B reflected on this:

Honestly, if my evaluations aren't good, then it's not a good fit. It's not. It's not about the fact that I'm not a good leader, whatever adjective you want to use. It's that it might not be a good fit.

Superintendent F shared, “That's what I've heard too from superintendents that the job can actually help you make that decision, that our visions aren't lining up. I think we've got to separate, and that's what you do.” Superintendent H also examined the importance of being a good fit for the
system: “Now, if six people say does not meet and one person says exceeds… quite frankly, if six people are saying a bad relationship with the board, it's time to leave.”

The evaluation documents of the superintendent’s work connect to the district’s plan for student achievement. There are instances when the vision of the superintendent does not align with the school board. Superintendents B, F, and H were all seasoned professionals and were confident in their work as superintendents and as instructional leaders. They were passionate about their work and believed in achieving their visions as instructional leaders; this was their driving force. It is more important to find a district where their vision aligns with the needs of the system and the expectations of the school board than to remain where the vision cannot be accomplished. Further, the expectations and thoughts of the school board are conveyed through the superintendent evaluation. This then fosters discussion.

Promoting discussion between the school board and superintendent. Superintendent G reflected upon the importance of discussion: “What I value here in District X is that it's a lot of emphasis on the conversation and on quality.” Superintendent C examined this further:

It was helpful as a way to have that conversation. I thought it was helpful for the board to be able to talk amongst themselves… things that I saw in writing were enriched even more by the fact that they had a conversation…. That event certainly was connected as a measure to how are we talking about student achievement.

The evaluation process facilitates conversations among school board members and between the superintendent and the school board. This can further develop the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. The evaluation is one aspect of a series of elements that can lead to the development of instructional leadership. The use of the word “quality” by Superintendent G was an important one. The quality of the discussion matters to the
superintendent. Thus, it is the discussion that is found to be a worthwhile experience. Further, the relationship between the superintendent and the school board affects the process; it affects the value of the discussions and these conversations are seen as valuable for growth. Thus, there are elements to the evaluation process that promote the development of an instructional leader.

**Connections to instructional leadership and growth.** The superintendent evaluation can move the district forward as it supports the growth of the superintendent as an instructional leader. There is a connection to teaching and learning with the performance or work of the superintendent. The evaluation facilitates self-reflection by the superintendent. This self-reflection can promote the growth of the instructional leader. Further, the evaluation provides a means for identifying professional development needs.

**Link to teaching and learning.** Superintendent A examined this relationship:

Well, obviously there's a connection. The correlation has to be strong in terms of the document that you create to assess the performance of the superintendent. Again, I think that starts… with establishing instructional goals for the district…. They also should have an activity where the school board is intimately engaged in the process.

The evaluation of the superintendent connects to teaching and learning. The relationship with the school board is further highlighted as important here. The board that is “intimately engaged in the process,” as stated by Superintendent A, is seen as valued. We see again the importance of goals as a driving force behind the work of the superintendent. Hence, connecting to goals continued to be a significant factor as the superintendents further examined their evaluations. They were also able to reflect on this and other elements of the process.

**Facilitation of self-reflection.** Superintendent G provided insight into the connection between goals and reflection as the evaluation is examined: “This map was my goal reflection,
goal review…. These were the indicators and the progress on the indicators and added ones, because you see there's more bullets now… a real tie-in to the district goals and the board goals.” Superintendent C discussed this further and included the school board: “What comes through from the board is that they feel we're paying attention to student learning, so when we're publishing the data on that we're putting it in context. We're talking about how it connects with our goals.”

The evaluation tool provides a vehicle of self-reflection for the superintendent and the school board; it is a reflective process. As stated earlier, self-reflection is a critical element of instructional leadership. The evaluation documents the vision of the superintendent as an instructional leader as it connects to district goals. Superintendents can then reflect on the accomplishment of their goals and better understand the thoughts of the school board in relation to these goals. Superintendents G and C illustrated the reflection that occurs once an evaluation is completed. Through this reflection, superintendents work within the cycle of planning, implementing and revising. They make connections and see the big picture. The evaluation provides the means for this to occur. The evaluation also serves to educate the school board on the work of the superintendent and shed light on opportunities for professional growth.

**Vehicle for professional growth.** Superintendent F examined the connection to a superintendent’s professional growth:

The evaluation document should help drive the professional growth of whoever you’re working with… it can help you focus on areas that you want to work on. If you're smart you'll integrate those things that you want to do into the evaluation thing through the goals and stuff that you want to set for the school district.

With a deeper understanding of the superintendent’s work, the school board can use the evaluation document to foster growth as an instructional leader. Superintendent F revealed the
value that can be found through the evaluation process. The evaluation can be used to grow professionally and achieve district goals. Therefore, it is through confidence in abilities and a clear vision of instructional leadership that this can be enhanced and then further developed. There are additional elements that contribute to the development of an instructional leader that must be considered.

**Areas to consider within the superintendent evaluation.** The superintendents clarified other factors that influence their evaluation process and their growth as instructional leaders. First, there appears to be a disconnect between what should happen and what does happen. Next, school districts need adequate time to complete the process. Also, school boards may need to review their practices. Finally, evaluation, by its very nature is a difficult task for individuals to complete.

**Time to complete the process.** Superintendent B shared, “It’s hard, and it takes time.” Superintendent D examined the reality of the evaluation: “Yeah, so realistically my evaluation experience is non-public meetings, one each year, and the discussion is maybe 20 minutes altogether, so there's just not a lot to go on there.”

The evaluation process can be involved and takes time to complete. School board members and the superintendent must plan for the process that may involve written documents, reflections, and at least one meeting. This can be difficult to accomplish when leading a busy system. In New Hampshire, the evaluation process is determined by individual school districts. Thus, the components and process may differ. It was found that the time spent on the evaluation process varies from one brief meeting to a lengthy process that spans a few months. Adequate time for reflection is needed, however. The factor of time can affect other areas, like the need to review and reevaluate the current process.

**Review and reevaluate the process.** Superintendent D shared an experience:
In terms of evaluation, we haven't spent a lot of time thinking about it. It's one of those ones where I told the new chair, “Here's how it was done last year. How would you like to do it?” He'd probably spend half an hour thinking about it.

Superintendent F explored this further:

To be very, very honest with you, because I've been here so long, it's been a little bit loosy, goosy. What will happen in March, they'll say, “F, we'd like for you to work on this, this, and this.” “Got it.”

The evaluation process, once established, may be difficult to change. School boards can find themselves completing a process in the same way each year because that is standard practice. School boards and superintendents need time to assess current practices and revise when necessary. Of the work within the system, it may be difficult to recognize and then find the time to review and reevaluate the evaluation of the superintendent. As seen by Superintendent F, regardless of the process, the superintendent is still confident as an instructional leader. The evaluation can confirm the work of the superintendent.

**Difficulties of evaluation.** Superintendent B explored the difficulties with evaluation:

The whole process, as you know, again because of your role evaluation is difficult… you want to take their strengths and work from their strengths, but you do have to address sometimes those things that maybe need some improvement and that’s [sic] not easy.

Superintendent F examined further barriers:

No matter what anybody says, the superintendent's position is a political position. You have a political body evaluating a politician, as part of the job. What other profession, if you think about it, have nonprofessionals evaluating a professional?

It is a difficult task to evaluate an individual’s performance. Superintendent B revealed that
one complexity in evaluation is the need to provide positive feedback and the challenge to document issues. School board members, with a variety of backgrounds, complete the evaluation of the superintendent. This can complicate the process. Superintendent F highlighted two important issues. First, the school board is a political body that must complete the evaluation of another political figure. This arrangement is unique and not within the normal practices of evaluation. Second, school board members are primarily not educators and have little experience with the work of the superintendent. It is difficult to measure the full extent of the performance of the superintendent. This needs to be further addressed.

A quality process, that is measureable, is needed. The superintendent evaluation should be more than one event and a variety of tools should be used to measure success. Thus, it is not easy for the board to evaluate and measure instructional leadership. The board needs to learn to use the tool effectively. One way to use the tool effectively and promote instructional leadership is to focus on the feedback within the process.

**Feedback for Growth as an Instructional Leader**

One element of the superintendent evaluation is the feedback provided by the evaluators. Feedback is a form of communication that offers more information; feedback serves a purpose. The right feedback can promote the growth of the superintendent as an instructional leader. Feedback is powerful. When reflecting upon their experiences with feedback within their evaluation process, superintendents believe the following: (a) feedback has a specific function in their development of instructional leadership skills, (b) certain qualities of feedback promote instructional leadership, (c) ratings and scores must be used with caution, and (d) superintendents have specific needs in the area of feedback (see Table 4).

**Functions of feedback specific to instructional leadership.** The functions or purposes of
feedback are many when reviewing all operations of a system. Feedback for instructional leadership provides the superintendent with specific information. Feedback is a form of communication, offers insight from the school board, and validates the work of the superintendent.

**Form of communication.** Superintendent D reflected on a feedback experience:

It fell into what I would describe as the kind of classic arrangement of... they had talked, they had something they wanted to give me as feedback and they're nice people and a group, so they gave me two nices... (and an improvement). It's an okay default place.

Superintendent A shared the value of receiving feedback: “Any feedback from school board about any areas where I had to improve with respect to instructional leadership, generally they would start with the issue of, we're not doing as well as we should be in a particular area.”

Feedback is a form of communication from the school board to the superintendent.

Superintendents A and D provided examples that informed this concept. Superintendent D was satisfied with the feedback received from the school board. Feedback as a form of communication met a need for this superintendent. There was a sense of safeness with the role as instructional leader. Further, feedback can promote discussions and build relationships with the school board. Feedback can also offer further information from the school board.

**Insights from the school board.** Superintendent F explored this concept: “Having them bring in their experience from the outside, what they've seen in the community, and saying, ‘Here's some things we think we've got to do to make the district better.’” Superintendent F further stated, “The feedback you get from the board, in essence, is a continuing series of inputs as to what's going on in the community, because you can't be everywhere all the time.”

The school board provides feedback to the superintendent within the evaluation process. Superintendent F saw value in feedback from the school board. The school board offers a unique
Table 4

*Feedback for Growth as an Instructional Leader*

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perspective and insights. These insights include information from the community. The superintendent and school board are a team, working together to better the system. Also, the school board, through the evaluation process, can confirm the efforts of the superintendent.

*Validation of work.* Superintendent C examined how feedback helps the growth of instructional leaders:

I mean the feedback in that area of the evaluation was really all about validating that there's a strategy in place, our goals are focused on student learning, our teachers’ contract focuses on student learning and we're doing a good team focused job, administratively, to carry those things through.

Superintendent H examined specific comments on an evaluation and made sense of them:

“There’s understanding… they totally understood what my role was there... I'm the one that creates strategies, but I'm not the worker bee. That's helpful, that tells me that they understand what my role is; they understand the job description.” Superintendent C shared further insights: “Exactly, so the fact that the school board recognizes that, to me speaks to some validation, that that's the
direction we've been able to head.”

Feedback is valuable to the development of instructional leadership when it confirms the work of the superintendent. Feedback provides direction to the superintendent; it informs the superintendent about the work of the district. Superintendent C pointed out that feedback validates this work. It is important for the superintendent to receive this validation from the school board. With validation comes the support of resources. These efforts will also move the district forward and accomplish the vision of the superintendent. Thus, the school board has a critical role in the instructional leadership of the system. Therefore, feedback can communicate the expectations, needs, and direction of the school board. It can align the school board’s expectations with those of the superintendent. As discussed earlier, the work of the superintendent is intentional. The feedback confirms this intentionality.

As demonstrated by the points above, feedback can be useful to the instructional leader. It is a form of communication and fosters discussion. Feedback is a catalyst for future conversations about teaching and learning. Again, it is important to the superintendent to receive information from the school board about the direction of the district and the validation of initiatives. There are specific qualities of feedback that superintendents find effective in their development as instructional leaders.

**Qualities of feedback that promote instructional leadership.** As revealed through the data, superintendents find specific qualities of feedback applicable to their development as instructional leaders. Feedback should provide encouragement; be specific and offer an explanation; be direct, clear, and concrete; give direction; and be fair, honest, and factual.

**Offers of encouragement from school board.** Superintendent H examined the school board’s efforts, “This is the body’s work.” Superintendent B shared an example of encouraging
The board is saying, ‘We're not there yet. Don't give up. Keep at it. We're going to get it,’ and that kind of feedback, like, ‘Okay, go for it. Keep going. Keep pushing.’” Superintendent B also stated, “You really need to be measuring in outcomes… otherwise, it’s very subjective.”

Superintendents value the feedback from school board members. Encouragement was found to be important to their work as instructional leaders. Superintendent B provided a caution about “subjective” comments. This form of feedback does not facilitate the work of the instructional leader. In order to avoid subjectivity, feedback should be specific and offer an explanation.

**Provides specifics and the “why.”** Superintendent B shared, “Yeah, if there are issues, they need to be specific.” Superintendent C reflected on recent feedback: “Same as you think of student assessment and feedback, it's always more helpful to be a little more specific than just to say, ‘Hey, nice job,’ or, ‘Hey, try to improve in your communication.’” Superintendent E explored this further: “It's like, but what does a better job look like... you have to actually add the verbiage around it, almost like a law that includes the vocabulary within it.” Finally, Superintendent C connected to the intentionality of the work:

The comments that were most helpful to me... were things that in the area of strengths spoke to specific things that I could go back to say, “Yeah, that was intentionally done.”

What seemed to be most helpful was when people could identify their comment with why they're making it.

Feedback should be specific; it should provide detailed strengths, areas of improvements, and examples. Feedback should explain the comments and provide the “why.” Superintendents B, C, and E responded to the type of feedback that was helpful to their growth as instructional leaders. As demonstrated here, superintendents welcome feedback, even if it communicates problems. It is
better to know and address the concern than to have no concept of its existence. However, this needs to be clearly articulated and defined. Superintendents who are confident in their abilities and are focused on their visions are ready to attend to issues and move forward. Also, as Superintendent C noted, feedback can confirm or acknowledge work that was intentional. Thus, it is an affirmation of a thoughtful initiative as an instructional leader.

**Direct, clear, and concrete.** Superintendent D reflected on this:

Candidly, they were so nice about being careful with it that this last year I said, “I got it, I'm good. Be direct so I don't miss it… I just don't want to miss the feedback you're giving me right now because you're being so careful.”

Superintendent C reflected and provided further insights: “When the feedback seems connected to the goals that we're talking about, it seems most helpful. When the feedback has enough clear and concrete pieces to it to be actionable, that's helpful.”

Feedback should also be detailed, clear, and concrete to be useful. This provides superintendents with a sense of where the school board stands with their work and where they should head. As Superintendent D pointed out, directness is helpful. Thus, concrete feedback facilitates a connection to the district goals, as shared by Superintendent C. Superintendent D valued the input from the school board and wanted to ensure the message is heard and received. It is only then that the district can move forward in its work. Also, it is important to connect feedback to district goals, as they are the driving force behind student achievement. Thus, feedback should provide action items and be based on outcomes; it should provide direction. This was evident as the superintendents reflected on the feedback that was helpful to their growth as instructional leaders. Thus, feedback offers direction from the school board.

**Provides direction from the school board.** Superintendent D explored this concept:
“Yes, though I would say to add to that, when the feedback is in the realm of helping with priorities, because there's so much good stuff we could do.” Superintendent F examined this also:

The ones that have helped the most have been, “Okay F, you said you wanted to get the district here. What are you doing to move us in that direction…what additional things do you have to do that you need support from us or we want you to do to get us in that direction?”

In order for the feedback from the school board to assist the superintendent as an instructional leader, the feedback must provide direction. This direction should align to the goals of the system. The emphasis for Superintendent F was on the goal. Superintendents are goal oriented and feedback that provides specific tasks or outcomes helps superintendents to prioritize efforts and focus their leadership teams. Their work is driven by an internal motivation and vision. However, the job of the superintendent can be hindered when feedback is not a true representation of their work.

_Fair, honest, and based on facts._ Superintendent F shared:

To be fair to the superintendent, the board has to have a consensus to say, “Okay, here is what we're looking for. This is what we'd like for you to do.” This is what we're going to evaluate you on…. Everybody knows what the game is; it's not fair to either party to do otherwise. It really isn't and it creates dysfunction.

Superintendent B remarked that an “honest conversation is needed.” Superintendent H reflected on the importance of honesty, “In my evaluations, I want honesty. I just don't need brutal honesty.” Superintendent H also explored the importance of fact versus opinion:

It's one person's opinion, but it's not fact. Opinion and fact are two different things. It's
either accurate or inaccurate… that kind of nonsensical, out of the blue, meaningless statement showing up in somebody's evaluation is hurtful and counterproductive because what that told me that is the school board wasn't taking their job seriously… useless, absolutely useless.

As superintendents work to achieve their vision, they value a true assessment of these efforts. Feedback should also be fair, honest, and based on facts. It should be constructive and not condescending. Superintendent H spoke with emphasis as he described a past evaluation in a former district. Feedback is seen as “useless” when it is not based on fact. Statements that are not based on fact can occur often as school board members seek to move forward their own agendas within the evaluation process or make their comments personal instead of focusing on the specific job of the superintendent. This can also be seen in the comments made by Superintendent F. This connects to the importance of the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. Honest conversations promote reflection.

Superintendents are very passionate about their work. They genuinely care about their school communities and the initiatives they have instituted. The role of the superintendent can be challenging and all encompassing as it includes long days and an extended work week. Many superintendents are humble individuals and do not seek recognition for themselves, but look to have their staff acknowledged for what they do. They are looking for a fair and honest evaluation of their efforts. This reaffirms their work and can motivate them to succeed further. However, one element that may bring confusion to the evaluation process is the use of ratings and scores.

**Using ratings and scores.** It is common for evaluations to consist of ratings or scores as part of the process. These can be numbers or descriptors, such as “meets expectations.” Ratings and scores can guide the process and be used to further explain criteria. This is a form of feedback.
Ratings and scores need to be clearly understood, can distract from the work of the superintendent, and may harm the relationship between the superintendent and school board. The superintendents were asked to share their experiences with ratings and scores in their evaluation process.

**Provides guidance within evaluation process.** Superintendent B explored this concept: “To be honest, I think many school boards feel safe with numbers… It's like the monkey bars, you know. You got to hold onto something, right? They feel safe in that area, you know?” Superintendent E further explained: “What does exceptional look like on this…. What's unacceptable look like? What as a board can you not live without? That's your rubric that gets a zero or a one; what can we not live with as a board?”

Rubrics and scores guide the evaluation process as they further explain criteria.

Superintendent B’s simile comparing number scoring to the monkey bars was an interesting one. School boards lack training in how to complete the superintendent evaluation. They may have insufficient experience in evaluating an employee. Evaluators may also have little to no background in education. Using a number system or descriptors is helpful and can provide structure to the process. As previously stated, structure within the evaluation is sought. However, more information is needed than mere numbers or words that stand alone.

**Explanations needed for clarity.** Superintendent B shared, “I haven't gotten a lot of negative comments so if I got a three, then I didn't really get any reason why it was just a three, so I read it. I interpreted it myself…” Superintendent G further stated:

What does that mean? Did I just tick someone off? Was that just lack of understanding?

What can I improve on a two that the others thought I did a seven, eight, or nine on?…. There was the option to give explanation, but I tended not to get explanations from low ratings.
Feedback should explain the descriptors on the evaluation; in order to make sense of the scores, they need to be clarified. These comments make clear the need for written feedback that connects to the scores. An issue that can arise when using a rating system is a lack of consistency in the scores. The numbers or descriptors may hold a different value for the evaluators. To avoid inconsistencies, ratings should be used in conjunction with feedback. Without this, superintendents make sense of their evaluation through reflection, but there is no real understanding of the school board’s intentions. This can lead to confusion and take away from the forward direction of the system.

**Distraction from work of instructional leader.** As Superintendent B first shared, “If you're reflecting on your work, I mean, if worried about the numbers, I think that can... you can lose sight of what you're doing. Two or three bothers me a little bit, to be quite frank.” Superintendent D then explained, “It’s not quite that simple but at least it provides a little map. All of the rubrics took us off that path. Let’s just write about how’s progress going on these big picture things.”

Some superintendents indicated there is little value in the numbers and this can be a distraction from the real efforts of instructional leadership. It can be seen here that scores are subjective and can hinder the process and professional growth. Superintendents, due to the enormity of their roles, must remain focused on the goals of the district and their vision. The scoring on an evaluation system can distract them from achieving their vision. The comparison to a map by Superintendent D confirmed this. To examine this further, a misunderstanding about a rating or score can actually hinder the relationship.

**Brings harm to the relationship between superintendent and school board.**

Superintendent H shared insights:

Relationship with the board, and four people say “exceed,” two people say “meets,” and
one person says “does not meet”... say you're the board member and you put down “does not meet,” that would color my opinion of my relationship with you, so of what value is that to me?

Superintendent G provided one example: “Then there are no surprises. If the hammer falls in April and you have no idea that you did something before that, is that the place you wanna work?”

Superintendent F agreed with this: “Same with me and the school board, it should not be a surprise, I may disagree with a three versus a four, but who cares? It shouldn't be a surprise. That's the way I think an evaluation should be.”

Ratings and scores can harm the relationship between the superintendent and school board member. Superintendent H made this clear. The school board works as one body. This is true when completing the evaluation of the superintendent. Because of this, the individual scores are not relevant to his growth. A poor rating from one member can be damaging to that relationship with the superintendent. Thus, ratings of individual scorers should remain anonymous and an average be given to the superintendent. One final area that can harm the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is the lack of transparency when issues arise. The scores should not be a surprise. Superintendents should enter into the process with a good understanding of their work and the school board’s approval or disapproval of this work. If not, the element of trust can be affected and the relationship can be diminished. What, then, are the feedback needs of superintendents?

**Feedback needs of the superintendent.** As superintendents reflected on their evaluation process, specific needs became evident. First, superintendents want feedback. Second, a discussion with the school board and a narrative form of feedback is helpful. Third, more feedback is needed beyond the formal evaluation process. Fourth, acknowledgements in various forms matter to
A need for feedback. When reflecting on receiving feedback, Superintendent D stated, “But you do want it.” Superintendent H examined the feedback process and what is needed: “Lots of quality statements within each area, and then recommendations, and then ‘nice job’ basically.” Superintendent D recommended, “Go into non-public and say, ‘This is not part of your evaluation, but let's call it feedback. What are we working on? What are the things that we're attending to? What's going well? What's not going well?'”

Superintendents have a need for feedback from their school boards. This was established through the interview process. Thus, feedback provides the superintendent with information. The information is used to better understand the system and ensure the instructional leadership efforts are successful. However, feedback must be in the right format to be useful.

More discussion and a narrative. Superintendent E shared what was useful:

A lot of times if someone just says you need to do a better job… that for me is if I can have narrative that way I can have an understanding of what the board's expectations are in the upcoming year.

Superintendent A shared: “It was more rhetorical, and that's helpful to me. It ends up being rhetorical and constructive versus a condemnation that the system's not working.”

There are forms of feedback that assist the superintendent in the work of the system over others. The use of language is important here. Superintendents need language that explains. The conversation becomes a critical element. Thus, it is the narrative and the discussion that helps the superintendent connect the work to the goals and can provide growth as an instructional leader. This process can be enhanced with a positive relationship between the superintendent and school board. The format of the feedback can also be helpful. As Superintendent E indicated, a narrative
is helpful and fosters reflection. This brings the evaluation away from the ratings and focuses mainly on the work of the superintendent. However, there is evidence to support that the formal evaluation of the superintendent, the one event, is not enough.

**Beyond a formal evaluation.** When asked what form of feedback would be useful,

Superintendent A shared:

>The spontaneous feedback, because for me it was real, as opposed to an evaluation form. It had a context to how the work gets done in our school district. No, you want to know about it now—you don't want to know about it two weeks from now.

Superintendent D shared:

>There's some pretty good evidence that low stakes regular feedback does help teachers improve… I know there are things that I'm off on or that I waste a lot of time on or that are really valuable to people but I don't do. I just don't know what those things are because I don't have a good enough feedback mechanism.

It was found that an annual evaluation of the superintendent does not provide adequate feedback to the chief instructional leader of the system. More is needed. Feedback should be given in smaller portions instead of in one large evaluation document. This way, it can be administered immediately, frequently, and spontaneously. Superintendent A’s use of the word “real” provides further insight into feedback that is useful to superintendents. This is connected to the work of the system. It is this work that can raise student achievement. Superintendents also refer to the research on feedback to better understand their needs. There are important insights into the needs of superintendents in the area of feedback offered here. Feedback should be provided regularly; it should be ongoing. Many believe the superintendent does not need to receive words of praise or encouragement. However, this is not the case. Feedback that is given on a regular basis provides
continued direction and motivation for the superintendent. Spontaneous feedback is “real” as stated by Superintendent A. Superintendent D referred to this type of feedback as “low stakes.” This type of feedback can build the atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the district and between the superintendent and the school board. This can be demonstrated through forms of acknowledgement.

Providing acknowledgements. Superintendent E explored the needs of superintendents in this area:

- It's important to receive [accolades], but as a superintendent you don't; that's the culture.
- You could go for months and never hear that you've done something well. Only the things you do poorly. In that way, it's not rewarding.

Superintendent E reflected further and offered final thoughts about the feedback needs of superintendents:

- Maybe it's a lot of different little things. If your meetings are broadcast maybe some time to say thank you to the superintendent publicly on television. It could be a handwritten note that says, Thank you for preparing x, y, and z at the last minute. Superintendents do those things with no acknowledgement.

The work of the superintendent is difficult and requires long hours. These efforts should not go unnoticed by school boards. Acknowledgements and a “thank you” can help build a better relationship between school board members and the superintendent. These forms of feedback can also foster a culture of respect within the school district and the community. Hence, feedback should be more than written comments on an evaluation document. It should be in many forms and in many places. There are countless opportunities for feedback within the system. This, in turn, helps the superintendent accomplish goals, grow as an instructional leader, and increase student
achievement. There are factors, however, that can impact the evaluation process and the
development of instructional leadership.

**Influences on the Evaluation Process and the Growth of Instructional Leadership**

As the superintendents shared their experiences about the evaluation process and the
feedback they receive that promotes their growth as instructional leaders, other factors emerged
that can influence this development. These factors included: (a) the relationship between the
superintendent and school board, (b) the school board qualities that promote student achievement,
(c) community connections to student achievement, and (d) accountability of the superintendent
and school board (see Table 5).

**Relationship between the superintendent and school board.** It was found that the
relationship between the superintendent and the school board is critical to the success of the system
and advancement of student achievement. The superintendents value and understand the
importance of these relationships. Certain qualities of the relationship have been identified as
contributing positively to the system; the school board must become part of the team and the
relationship must be nurtured.

**Qualities of the relationship.** Superintendent G examined the qualities of the relationship:
“Also very trusting to the administrators and myself in terms of guiding the district in the right
direction, and that's been a very positive experience for me.” Superintendent H shared the elements
of a positive relationship:

Absolutely, and I think the superintendent and the board have to have a close relationship.

They have to have a proactive relationship and they have to have a truthful relationship…
that they respect you as a professional, they know you've done your homework.
In order to foster the development of instructional leadership, the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is critical. This relationship should be a partnership based on mutual respect, trust, and honesty. This is a positive working relationship with a focus on collaboration. It is clear; the need for a relationship built on mutual trust and respect is needed. The superintendents understand this need and work to secure positive relationships with school board members.

**Becoming part of the team.** Superintendent B further explored the relationship: “The board is the superintendent's support system. The board wants to have a relationship with their superintendent. They want to have a spirit of camaraderie and team.” When discussing the team qualities of the relationship with the school board, Superintendent B mentioned a “spirit of camaraderie and team” is needed. Superintendent F examined this relationship and connected it to the team approach:

It is, in fact, a team. If it's not a team, then you have issues that spill all the way down to the classroom level, which is not a good thing. To go back to the beginning, it only goes to emphasize more, the development of relationships with the people.
The concept of the team approach is reflected here. Superintendents seek to build a team with the school board just as is done with the administrators within the district. This connects to the team mentality that superintendents see as valuable when working with the district administrators. It is part of their leadership mentality. This now applies to the school board. This team is built through mutual respect and trust. The superintendents understand the need for positive working relationships with school board members, but this relationship requires effort.

_Nurturing the relationship._ Superintendent H explored how a bond is made with individual school board members: “Open door. Any board member, any time can come in and talk about anything.” Superintendent G shared further strategies:

Just a one-on-one conversation that I got to know some of the things about him, he heard some of the things about me, we were talking about education, and I think it will help in the next board meeting that we know each other.

Superintendent F also met individually with school board members and provided additional insights: “What we try to do is offer individual one-on-one meetings. I've done this in the past, ‘Won't you come on in… I'll answer any questions that you have.’ It's that ongoing communication that's key.”

Superintendent E provided details on how to nurture this relationship: “I discovered that you can never communicate enough but it's easy to over-communicate with your board. I think that giving those pieces of information, like making sure to communicate as much as possible, is really important.”

Superintendents seek to connect with school board members on a personal level. This enhances their working relationship. The superintendents believe it is their responsibility to build these connections. Thus, superintendents understand the importance of a strong working
relationship with their school boards. They personalize their work with each member; this is seen by the mention of “one-on-one” approaches. Communication facilitates the development of these relationships. Further, superintendents realize the goals of the school district and their visions cannot be accomplished without the help of school board members. They see the time spent working on the relationships as valuable. It takes time to build positive relationships, but this pays off as district initiatives are accomplished. Thus, the relationship between the superintendent and the school board can help to facilitate student achievement. These efforts cannot be gained through the work of the superintendent alone. There are specific qualities of school boards that facilitate the work of the system.

School board qualities that promote student achievement. It became apparent that certain school board qualities could contribute to the development of the superintendent as an instructional leader and support student achievement. Therefore, school boards, as a body, and individual members possess certain qualities that advance the system. School boards need to keep teaching and learning at the forefront of their work. They need to understand their place in the system. The various experiences and backgrounds of school board members can be a positive element. Finally, the tenure of the members affects the functioning of the school board.

Focus on teaching and learning. Superintendent A examined the school board in relation to knowledge of teaching and learning: “They were very good students, good learners, good listeners, and were able to grasp the rudimentary concepts.” Superintendent H explored the school board in connection to the curriculum: “School boards look at the various needs they have. If curriculum needs are a priority, then you'll see a lot of curriculum goals.”

School boards must keep teaching and learning as a central focus. As the chief instructional
leader, it is the superintendent that guides and instructs the members. This is a critical aspect of the work of the superintendent. Thus, the superintendent must first educate school board members, which then facilitates the development of goals focused on teaching and learning. This is one responsibility of the school board. School boards have a very specific role within the system.

**Understand place in the system.** Superintendent G shared the school board’s focus: “Lots of deference to the administration. They are a board that is not interested in the day-to-day management stuff; they are interested in the big picture, they're interested in supporting the administration.” Superintendent F shared the role of the school board further:

I think the board’s role really comes down to being able to listen to what the professionals are saying… and then supporting through recognition, funding, staffing levels, and defending. It's really what it comes down to—buying into it and promoting it.

Finally, Superintendent E stated, “They are a very involved board.”

The system works more effectively when all members work towards common goals and recognize their role in this venture. Members must understand their place in the system to facilitate its success. The school board is responsible for setting policy, a budget, and overseeing the superintendent. School boards that understand their role work to support the superintendent and the vision of the district. Thus, superintendents see value in school boards that are engaged in district initiatives. Members must understand the needs of the district and work to move the district forward. They must be educated on district initiatives. When this occurs, the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is strengthened, the school board is viewed as part of the team, and student success can be increased. Further, school board members use their experiences and background to enhance their work.

**Experiences and backgrounds of school board members.** Superintendent E examined the
diversity school board members bring to their work: “Their own line of work, their own understanding. Their own biases of their own public school experience.” Superintendent F shared further: “I've been fortunate in that the majority of board members I work with in X have had management experience; that makes a difference.” Superintendent C reflected on the topic:

We have a whole array of different people on the board, which is great and everybody serves a role and feels they have a particular voice in the conversation. Part of that comes into, I think, how they view their role as it relates to student achievement.

There are few mandated requirements to hold a seat on the local school board. This being said, the experiences and backgrounds of members vary greatly. As explored by Superintendent E, there are many factors that contribute to the different beliefs school board members bring to their work within the system. Superintendents F and C saw the differences in the members as positively contributing to the work of the school board. These individuals bring a variety of backgrounds and experiences to their position. These can help the district move forward as diversity can bring varying viewpoints. However, it is this same diversity that can become challenging within the evaluation process and the development of the superintendent as an instructional leader. Issues occur when school board members do not have a firm grasp of educational initiatives. This may lead to a lack of support. Further, school board members may not possess the educational background to truly understand the position of the superintendent. This makes evaluating the top educator in a district a challenge. When looking at experiences, this includes the years served in the elected position and was found to influence the work of the school board.

Tenure of school board members. Superintendent G shared, “It’s very fortunate that the board has been very stable… a lot of stability, and a lot of dedication to education.” Superintendent C confirmed this line of thinking by stating, “… because you look at the places
where superintendents have stayed a long time, and I would suspect those are your more stable boards.” Superintendent F explored further:

What you've got, which I think is really good for a school district, is a continuous history… To a great degree, it's like a marriage with the community and with the school board, philosophies in sync, general style, culture, the way to look at problems, issues that are coming up, and philosophy.

Regardless of the background of the school board, the tenure of the members can contribute positively to the operations of the system. Superintendents believe stability matters. As Superintendent F explained, there are benefits to long-term school board members. This importance is highlighted with the use of the phrase “marriage to the community.” Experienced school board members understand the workings of the system and are already part of the larger district team. They have been educated about district initiatives regarding teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment. Because of this, the superintendent can spend less time educating the school board and more time focused on moving the district forward. Relationships between the superintendent and the school board and among individual members have already been established. Hence, the school board has a deeper understanding of the role of the superintendent and can reflect this on the evaluation. Also, school board members with longer tenure have established relationships within the community.

Community connections to student achievement. The greater community influences the work of the superintendent as an instructional leader. In New Hampshire, education is primarily funded through monies raised by property taxes. This means the community must come to support the school district each year through the voting process. The superintendent and the school board work for the community.
Importance of the community. Superintendent E explored this concept: “I think the superintendents who are going to stay somewhere are going to stay in a community that values them. If they feel they're not valued, it doesn't matter.” Superintendent F reflected on the community connection:

I think for new superintendents coming in, if you've got a veteran school board, you should look to them to give you an idea of what the culture is in the community, and what the history is. You can step on a land mine real quick, if you don't know it.

The superintendent and the school board must first recognize the important part the community plays in the success of the system and then must understand the needs of the community. Superintendent F discussed the importance of understanding the culture within the community. School leaders must take into account the community needs in their district.

Awareness of community needs. Superintendent C shared:

The other leg to that communication piece is the broader community, which again I feel like is partly my responsibility to be communicating with the community around what the schools’ focus areas are, why are we looking for these things in our budget, why are making these changes, things like that.

Superintendent F stated, “[It] is to make sure that your philosophy, and the way you like to operate, and your personality matches the community, matches the board that you're there with.” Superintendent B stated, “You want to make sure you're effective and you want to make sure you're accountable to the community.”

Communities in New Hampshire vary greatly for such a small state. It is the superintendent, with the assistance of the school board, who works to meet the needs of the community. Effective instructional leaders realize the importance of this. The community is part of
the education that occurs within the system; it influences education. As an instructional leader, the superintendent must understand the needs of the community, the pulse of the community, and its culture in order to promote student achievement. These areas are reflected on the superintendent evaluation. The superintendent is involved in the community and makes connections. The community is the focus of the superintendent’s work and his or her work is connected to the community. Here, there is a connection to accountability.

**Accountability of the superintendent and school board.** Communities hold their school boards and superintendents accountable for their work. Accountability was a common thread throughout the interview process. Superintendents are aware of the connection between their work and being held accountable for its results. They accept responsibility in this area. There must be an understanding of mutual accountability within the system and this accountability can contribute to the growth of the instructional leader.

**Understanding mutual accountability.** Superintendent B reflected on the position: “You're spending taxpayers' money. They need to have accountability.” Superintendent F shared, “It's just that superintendents are more public. Somebody leaves management in a private corporation, you don't see banner headlines, ‘Superintendent Leaves.’” There is a sense of mutual accountability. Superintendent C examined this relationship with the community, “Not so much from an individual accountability standpoint of a classroom teacher, so much as a mutual accountability on the team level and the school level and the district level.”

The school board is accountable. The superintendent is accountable. The district as a whole is accountable. These elements of accountability are important to the community and critical to the success of the system. Again, we see the reference to a “team.” It is through this team approach that the superintendent is held accountable for student success.
**Accountability for growth of instructional leadership.** Superintendent A shared insights on accountability:

That also, it helped me as a superintendent, do my job better in terms of holding my people professionally accountable. Not snooping, not what are called snoopervision. It was about, if we're going to get better, we need to know what the concerns are.

Superintendent C reflected on this: “Let's pay attention to accountability, from a sense again our own district accountability, what we're holding ourselves accountable for and how does that interface with the state and other accountability pressures.”

As superintendents focus on student success, they further develop their skills as instructional leaders. First, superintendents believe all levels of the district are accountable. Next, superintendents realize they are held accountable to all levels of the system to achieve the goals of the school district. Accountability and community are interrelated concepts. They are part of the system and contribute to the successes or failures of that system. The superintendent evaluation process can measure the instructional leadership qualities and efforts of the superintendent. The process documents the accountability.

**Conclusion**

The experiences of superintendents in New Hampshire with their evaluation process shed light on the importance of feedback to enhance their growth of instructional leaders in order to promote student achievement. The superintendent, as an instructional leader, works within a system to achieve a vision. This is done through reflection, collaboration, and support from the school board. The superintendent’s abilities facilitate these accomplishments and growth is found primarily through internal motivation. The superintendent evaluation is a complex process that can move the district forward and enhance instructional leadership. When provided correctly, the
feedback within the evaluation process can benefit superintendents and promote professional growth. There are also influences that affect the evaluation process and the development of instructional leadership in superintendents. Thus, the superintendent evaluation process can provide feedback that develops instructional leadership, and ultimately promotes student achievement, if the specific factors are considered and addressed.
CHAPTER 5—DISCUSSION

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis study framed in cultural-historical activity theory was to explore the experiences of eight New Hampshire school superintendents with their evaluation process and feedback that promotes instructional leadership. Participants represented a variety of educational experiences and had worked in at least two school districts. The central phenomenon was the feedback used within the evaluation and was generally defined as those elements of the process that promote instructional leadership. The superintendents discussed those comments that were found useful in their growth as instructional leaders and, in turn, furthered their mission to advance student achievement within their school districts.

The Interpretive Phenomenological Approach and the Superintendent Evaluation

School superintendents in New Hampshire assume the role of chief instructional leader in their school districts. These leaders have a variety of experiences with their evaluation process. Further, the feedback received during this process ranged in quality and usefulness. The lived experiences of the superintendents were explored in accordance with the IPA approach (Smith et al., 2009). Through reflection, the superintendents sought to make sense of their evaluation process and the feedback they receive that promotes the development of instructional leadership. The researcher also sought to make sense of this experience. This is the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). The hermeneutic circle occurred through the data analysis as the whole was examined for its parts and the parts were explored in relationship to the whole (Smith et al., 2009). Each transcript provided a rich overview of the experiences. The transcripts were broken down into parts and themes were created. This continuous circle of analysis continued through each case. Then the cases, as parts, were explored in relation to the whole experience.

The meaning of the evaluation process and feedback was brought into consciousness through rich
discussions with the researcher about instructional leadership, the evaluation process, and feedback. Thus, the true essence of the evaluation experience was revealed, along with those experiences that lead to the development of the instructional leader. This demonstrates Husserl’s idea of deep reflection about an experience (Smith et al., 2009).

**Activity Theory and the Superintendent Evaluation**

The foundation of the research was grounded in activity theory. The real-life experiences of the superintendents’ evaluation process are social activities with a focus on the object of feedback. Much was learned about each of the elements within the activity theory framework.

Engeström provides the structure of an activity system (Blackler, 2009), which can be used to better understand the connection to activity theory and this body of research. Here, the superintendent has acted within the system to bring about change. The vehicle for this change is the evaluation document and is considered the activity system. The subject of the activity is the superintendent. All superintendents in the sample were passionate and dedicated to their work and the goal of student success.

In activity theory, shared tools are used to create shared activities (Blackler, 2009). The evaluation documents and process fulfilled this element of the theory. The tool, or the evaluation instruments, varied greatly across school districts from well developed to no formal structure. The feedback is the object of the activity or the horizon of possibilities (Blackler, 2009) as it can contribute to the outcome of instructional leadership. The object of the activity, or the feedback received, is a central focus of the work presented here. Superintendents receive differing amounts and types of feedback within their evaluation process. This feedback may or may not directly lead to the development of instructional leadership as it contrasts with what is found to be useful to the professional growth of the superintendents. Thus, the outcome of instructional leadership differs
among superintendents and school districts. The goal of student achievement is a consistent one among superintendents. The superintendents’ work is intentional as they plan, implement, revise, and reflect on goal attainment for student success.

Student achievement is not accomplished through the work of the superintendent alone. There are elements outlined by activity theory that affect the evaluation process and the feedback received: rules, the division of labor, and community. The rules guide the evaluation process and consist of state standards, school board policies, district strategic plans, district goals, and scores or rubrics. The state of New Hampshire provides standards that outline the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent. School board policies drive the evaluation process and provide structure to the process. The school district strategic plan focuses the practice of the superintendent as goals are written and accomplished. Goal attainment is central to the role of the superintendent; the goals of the district were found to drive the work of the superintendent. The ratings or scores used within the process to assess the superintendent are controversial and can be difficult to understand for those involved.

Using activity theory as a theoretical framework, the individuals involved or affected by the evaluation process are found in the division of labor. There is a definite hierarchy in the leadership of a school district. The top of the hierarchical pyramid is the school board. Within the school board, there is also a specified chain of command that was referred to often by the participants. The chairperson of the school board directs the other members and leads the charge to complete the evaluation of the superintendent. This position is a key means of support for the superintendent. Next in the hierarchy is the vice chairperson and then the other school board members. In New Hampshire, school boards vary in the number of elected members. In the current research, the size of the school boards ranged from five to nine members. The superintendent
reports directly to the school board and in most cases works primarily with the chairperson. There are individuals or groups that intersect within the evaluation process of the superintendent.

The community, within the activity theory structure, consists of the school board, school district employees, students, and the community as a whole. The relationships between the superintendent and each group are critical to the success of the organization. As noted by the participants, the school board acts as one body. The leadership team and the teachers were found to be relevant in the examination of the superintendent evaluation process and the growth of an instructional leader. The superintendents rely heavily on their administrative teams to plan and implement the goals that achieve their visions of teaching and learning. The teachers are valued members of the school district staff who implement these visions and make them a reality. Finally, it is the greater community that is served by the work of the superintendent. The superintendents are aware of their responsibility to the community and the need for accountability to this entity. On one level, this can be accomplished through the evaluation process.

Using the IPA approach and activity theory to explore the experiences of the superintendents with their development as instructional leaders, the evaluation process, and the feedback they receive revealed four super-ordinate themes: (a) the superintendent as instructional leader, (b) the superintendent evaluation process, (c) feedback for instructional leadership, and (d) influences on the evaluation process and the growth of instructional leadership. The experiences of the superintendents varied within each theme; however, common threads emerged upon examination. The results can provide insight into the superintendent as an instructional leader, the needs of superintendent within the evaluation process, and the feedback that promotes professional growth. Further, school boards and other stakeholders will better understand the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader, effective practices within the evaluation process, and the
feedback needs of superintendents. This understanding can promote student achievement within school districts. The story is an important element to the IPA method (Smith et al., 2009). Here the story of the superintendent’s evaluation process, the feedback received, and growth of an instructional leader was told.

The Superintendent as Instructional Leader

The superintendent, as leader of the school district (Graham, et al., 2015), is primarily responsible for student achievement (Bredeson, et al., 2011; Forner, et al., 2012). This is an enormous endeavor and one superintendent in New Hampshire takes it seriously. The superintendent is ultimately accountable (Bredeson et al., 2011; Forner et al., 2012). Further, according to the recently revised Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards, school district administrators must increase their attention to student achievement in order to prepare students for college or the world of work (CCSO, 2015).

The efforts of the superintendent, as chief instructional leader, were clearly defined throughout the data. Superintendents believe in their work and are passionate about it. It is first important to fully understand the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader in order to then explore the feedback that can facilitate growth in this area through the evaluation process. Instructional leadership can be examined across seven themes: (a) place and purpose in the system, (b) fostering a collaborative team approach, (c) supporting instructional efforts, (d) creating and implementing a vision, (e) reflection, the superintendent as a reflective practitioner, (f) fostering professional growth, and (g) confidence in abilities.

Place and Purpose Within the System

School districts are organizations with policies, guidelines, and ways of functioning. It is
policy that guides the decision-making and actions of individuals within the system.

Superintendents assume a unique position within the system; the system defines their role. Their role is of chief instructional leader, but it is also political in nature. These instructional leaders realize they hold critical positions within the school districts.

It was found that the superintendent works to achieve the goals of the district. The goals drive the work of the superintendent. Further, goal attainment is used to hold the superintendent accountable for student achievement. The school district goals are a driving force behind the work of the superintendent as an instructional leader. As seen by Forner et al. (2012), goal setting connects to leadership. Leaders attain their goals. Hence, a common thread throughout the data was the attainment of district goals. This is a main focus of the work of the superintendent as an instructional leader, but is also seen as contrary to the work of Whitt et al. (2015).

Whitt et al. (2015) believe the connection is not strong between the superintendent and instructional leadership. According to Whitt et al., superintendents believe the work of student achievement belongs with parents, teachers, and administrators. They fail to see their role. This belief was not apparent with superintendents from this study. First, the role of the superintendent is evolving due to the increased pressures for accountability. Second, superintendents have a deep understanding of their responsibilities; their commitment to student success is evident. Third, data suggests the connection to instructional leadership may not be direct as superintendents act to bring balance to the system at all levels and collaborate with and support their leadership teams and teachers to promote student achievement within their districts, but it is present.

**Fostering a Collaborative Team Approach**

Collaboration with others is an essential component to the success of the superintendent as an instructional leader. This was clearly communicated by the superintendents during the interview
process. It is interesting to note, multiple superintendents used sports analogies to emphasize the importance of teamwork. Superintendents achieve their goals through the team mentality; there is a team approach to leadership and joint ownership of the work. Goals are achieved by working closely with and supporting the leadership team. This relationship with the administrators is critical to accomplishing district goals and increasing student achievement. Further, for the system to succeed, the superintendent must support the leadership team, district personnel, and initiatives in a variety of ways.

**Supporting Instructional Efforts**

As the central figure within the system, the superintendent provides support through providing opportunities, securing resources, and creating an environment that supports teaching and learning. This concept of working with others and support within the system is supported through activity theory, as the subject, community, and rules affect the goal of student achievement. Superintendents intentionally, through planning and reflection, create opportunities and provide time to support teaching and learning. As instructional leaders, they broker the resources needed for the success of initiatives. This is done as they work with the school board on goals. Finally, it is essential that an environment conducive to learning and the attainment of goals is established. This, too, is ensured through the work of the superintendent, which is focused on the vision for the system.

**Creating and Implementing a Vision**

Research suggests the work of the superintendent centers around the formation of a vision and the attainment of goals to make the vision a reality (Lewis et al., 2011; Petersen, 2002). Thus, as an instructional leader, the superintendent implements the blueprint for student success (Lewis et al., 2011). As the superintendents reflected on their practice, the importance of the vision was
evident throughout the data of the current study. District goals provide the foundation for the vision of the superintendent. The fundamental goal is student achievement. It should be emphasized; superintendents are intentional about this work. Their actions promote their vision and they see this connection. The vision moves the district forward and focuses on the big picture. Further, this vision can lead to increased student achievement, which is the driving force of the vision. According to the participants, this is accomplished through planning and reflection.

**The Superintendent as a Reflective Practitioner**

As Spanneut et al. (2011) discussed, it is critical to student success that superintendents understand their responsibility and work to ensure this. Their focus must be on the success of their students (Bird et al., 2013). The current research indicates that superintendents plan for student success through a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, and revising efforts. This involves mindful, thoughtful, and intentional reflection and actions. Superintendents, through reflection, are aware of the importance of their growth as instructional leaders.

**Fostering Professional Growth**

Superintendents understand the need to grow professionally and as instructional leaders. According to Lewis et al. (2011), superintendents believe their work must focus on teaching and learning. As discussed by the participants, superintendents must stay current in the areas of teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment. Their work must be a model for others. This is confirmed by the work of Bird et al. (2013) as there is a connection between a school district’s accomplishments and a superintendent’s self-identification as an authentic leader. Further, the superintendents’ growth is dependent upon their confidence in their abilities and their own internal drive to succeed.
Whitt et al. (2015) believe superintendents failed to recognize their own abilities, or self-efficacy, and found failures in student achievement to lie with others. An analysis of the current data found the contrary. It is the belief in their abilities that fosters the development of instructional leadership within superintendents. The abilities, here, focus on teaching and learning and the confidence to lead those in the system. A driving force behind their success is the superintendents’ internal drive as instructional leaders. This is confirmed by the work of Hackman and Porter (1968).

Expectancy theory (Hackman & Porter, 1968) examines hard work. It is clearly seen that the work of superintendents is demanding and quite difficult. The basic principles of Expectancy theory apply here to the superintendents. Superintendents are focused on outcomes. They believe their hard work can affect these outcomes. Further, motivation increases as a result of this hard work (Hackman & Porter, 1968). The superintendents within the sample all demonstrated a high sense of intrinsic motivation to succeed as instructional leaders. It is the dedication to the students, staff, and community that helps them maintain high levels of job performance. Superintendents work hard and spend many hours at their job; they are dedicated individuals. Their greatest influence to success is found from within their own sense of passion for their practice.

To summarize, the current research aligns with the work of Forner et al. (2012) on effective leadership practices and was confirmed as the superintendents reflected on their role as instructional leaders. Superintendents attain goals to move the district forward; labor to garner support for district initiatives through the school board, community, and staff; work to improve the organization by addressing issues in a positive nature as they occur; and build a team with administrators. These connections are also found in activity theory as the reciprocal nature of the
rules, community, and subject connect to the goal of student achievement. The superintendent evaluation can facilitate this process.

**The Superintendent Evaluation Process**

As discussed, activity theory provides the theoretical framework for an exploration of the experiences of superintendents in their evaluation process and the feedback that promotes their instructional leadership. It is important to note, activity theory is based in practice (Sannino et al., 2009). The work of the superintendents, within their practice, was a primary focus of this research. Here, the emphasis is on individuals interacting with activities. The superintendent and the school board interact within the evaluation process. The focus is on the object, or the feedback that is provided during this process; there is an emphasis on the object. The reciprocity of the elements is essential to mention as the rules, subject, and division of labor now connect to the tool of the evaluation instrument. The tool is a vehicle for the object, or the feedback, which, in turn, facilitates the outcome of instructional leadership to achieve the goal of student achievement.

The NHSBA confirms the importance of this process and the connections within activity theory. The NHSBA states, in New Hampshire, the superintendent evaluation is a legal requirement of school boards. House (2012) also supports the need for a superintendent evaluation, as it is a legal responsibility of the school board to complete the process. This process is governed by contractual obligations and district policy (Christina, 2012). Guidelines are available to school boards through the NHSBA. Most participants reported their school boards use this organization for guidance, information gathering and training. It is important to note, the NHSBA emphasizes the need for an effective tool. Finally, according to Christina (2012), the evaluation should be beneficial. Through reflection of their experiences, the participants examined the evaluation process and how it is beneficial to their development as instructional leaders. Four themes emerged
as significant to the evaluation process: (a) characteristics of the superintendent evaluation, (b) functions of the superintendent evaluation, (c) connections to instructional leadership and growth, and (d) areas to consider within the superintendent evaluation.

**Characteristics of the Superintendent Evaluation**

The superintendent evaluation is a complex process governed by policy. The shared tool, within activity theory, of the evaluation process is used to complete the shared activity. Through this mutual work, the superintendent can transform as an instructional leader. First, the evaluation is beneficial when it connects to the strategic plan and goals. The participants reported the goals should be reflected in the evaluation. Second, the structure or actual process was found to vary across systems. Some districts complete the evaluation process with much structure, within a timeline, governed by policy. Other districts have less structure to the process and fewer requirements. Thus, the evaluation serves different functions for different superintendents. Third, the school board acts as one body to complete the evaluation. Fourth, as superintendents examined the school board’s role in the evaluation process, the chairperson emerged as a central figure of support. This connects to the division of labor within activity theory where there is a defined hierarchy of the school board. The chairperson assumes the leadership role of this group. Finally, and of great importance, the superintendent evaluation was viewed by the participants as one event; the evaluation is one event in the growth of the superintendent as an instructional leader. Thus, other factors can contribute to growth of instructional leadership. The superintendent evaluation, however, does have a purpose for the superintendent.

**Functions of the Superintendent Evaluation**

The evaluation highlights the work of the superintendent as a leader within the district who achieves goals and a vision. The superintendent evaluation documents the performance of the
superintendent. This documentation is a form of accountability; the superintendent is held accountable to the stakeholders. Here, the elements of rules and the community interact with the subject, as outlined within activity theory. As the evaluation process documents and holds the superintendent accountable for performance or the attainment of goals, it can serve as a vehicle to inform those involved if the relationship should continue. The participants strongly believed the evaluation apprises them of their fit with the school districts. If they are not fitted, it is better to achieve their visions elsewhere.

The evaluation process promotes discussions among school board members and between school board members and the superintendent. Christina (2012) confirms this belief; conversations can be facilitated through the evaluation process. It is these conversations that the participants found to be most beneficial to their development as instructional leaders. Thus, a focus of the evaluation should be placed on instructional leadership.

**Connections to Instructional Leadership and Growth**

According to Christina (2012), the two main goals of the superintendent evaluation are to provide the superintendent with feedback and to facilitate professional growth in the superintendent. As the participants examined their experiences with their evaluations, it became apparent that this tool, according to activity theory, could provide a vehicle for superintendents to reflect on their growth as instructional leaders. Thus, there is a link to teaching and learning. The evaluation process provides a structure for reflection by the superintendent on the role of instructional leadership and a means to communicate these reflections to the school board. Throughout the data collection process, superintendents emphasized their need to reflect on their practice. It is through this reflection that the participants realize needs for professional growth.
The evaluation process connects, documents, and reaffirms the elements of the work of the superintendent as an instructional leader. The superintendent evaluation process joins all of the working elements of activity theory together into one event with an outcome of student achievement. There are further areas to consider, however, in order for the evaluation process to be seen as effective.

**Areas to Consider Within the Superintendent Evaluation**

The participants agreed time was needed to complete the evaluation process. It can be difficult for school board members to provide formal feedback to the superintendent with other pressing issues to address within the system. Time is also needed to review and revise the process if it is not working. However, school districts are able to define their own evaluation process (House, 2012). It is important that the evaluation be completed accurately (Christina, 2012), but it was found that the act of evaluating performance is a difficult task. It is difficult for school boards to complete the process. The evaluation tool must be used correctly. It is hard to fully measure the many roles of the superintendent and the complexity of the position with one instrument or in one event. School boards measure what they can see; instructional leadership is difficult to quantify. However, providing feedback to the superintendent can make the process more effective in the promotion of the superintendent as an instructional leader.

In summary, the superintendent evaluation does connect to instructional leadership and student achievement. According to the NHSBA, the evaluation of the superintendent can be based on goals (Christina, 2012). As noted earlier, the participants in the research study emphasized the importance of district goals that drive their work as instructional leaders. The evaluation should also be based on standards. The NHSBA offers three areas that connect to instructional leadership: (a) curriculum, (b) delivery of instruction and student achievement, and (c) relationship with the
school board (Christina, 2012). It is recommended that these areas be assessed within the evaluation of the superintendent. Therefore, the one event of the superintendent evaluation has the means to provide feedback to the superintendent in the areas of teaching and learning. However, this can only be achieved if the process is viewed as beneficial to the superintendent. The feedback within the process can contribute to this.

**Feedback for Growth as an Instructional Leader**

There is a connection between the feedback within the evaluation process and the superintendent’s growth as an instructional leader. This is supported through the reciprocity of the elements within activity theory. The object, or central focus of the activity, is feedback. This feedback can produce the outcome of instructional leadership. The feedback is connected to the tool, subject, division of labor, rules, community, and the goal of student achievement.

The literature helps to make the connection between the feedback from the superintendent evaluation and the growth of instructional leadership. First, the NHSBA believes that the superintendent evaluation can move the district forward (Christina, 2012). Second, feedback can influence performance and motivation (Duijnhouwer et al., 2010). Third, feedback can affect intrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation is connected to performance in the workplace (Guo et al., 2014). Fourth, hard work is motivating (Hackman & Porter, 1968). Thus, the superintendent is motivated to succeed. Success here can be defined as increases in student achievement. The district moves forward as students reach various levels of success. Four themes emerged upon analysis of the data on feedback: (a) functions of feedback specific to instructional leadership, (b) qualities of feedback that promote instructional leadership, (c) using ratings or scores, and (d) feedback needs of the superintendent.
Functions of Feedback Specific to Instructional Leadership

When discussing their experiences with feedback, the participants revealed several functions that can be served within the evaluation process. It is a form of communication from the school board. Thus, it facilitates a conversation about teaching and learning. This is confirmed by Christina (2012) who views the evaluation of the superintendent as a catalyst for discussion between the two groups, the superintendent and the school board. Through this communication, the participants revealed they can better understand the expectations and thoughts of the members. Feedback from the school board also validates the work of the superintendent; it is informative and provides direction to the superintendent. When looking at activity theory, feedback can strengthen the relationship between the subject and community. Therefore, feedback can assist the superintendent in goal attainment and move the district forward. This forward motion is toward the direction of increased student achievement.

Qualities of Feedback That Promote Instructional Leadership

The participants examined the role of feedback within their evaluation process and its affects on the development of instructional leadership. The superintendents agreed that feedback is sought and does matter. After examination of the feedback received, superintendents believe feedback should (a) provide encouragement; (b) be specific and explain; (c) be direct, clear, and concrete; (d) provide direction; and (e) be fair, honest, and factual. This aligns with the literature that suggests the how (Cox, et al., 2011; Govaerts et al., 2013; Hardesty et al., 2014), what (Duijnhouwer, et al., 2010; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008), and who (Govaerts et al., 2013; Ilgen et al., 1979) of feedback matters.

Feedback that is beneficial connects to the superintendent as an instructional leader. Feedback should provide action items and be explanatory. Finally, feedback should be fair, honest,
nonbiased, and based on facts. Thus, unclear feedback fails to improve performance (Dipaola, 2010) and individuals receiving feedback prefer it to be positive and fair (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008). According to the participants, feedback practices that do not conform to the above suggestions can harm the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. It is this relationship that matters in the development of instructional leadership. Thus, the evaluators need to be viewed as credible (Ilgen et al., 1979) and possessing a certain skill set and expertise to provide feedback (Govaerts et al., 2013). Feedback within the superintendent evaluation process usually involves some type of ratings or scores. This is a form of feedback and must be considered.

Using ratings and scores. The elements of activity theory interact as the rules, or rubric and scoring are a part of the tool within the process and affect the subject, community, and object. As the participants examined the use of ratings and scores within their evaluation process, it became evident there are positive aspects, but there are also dangers of their use that can be quite harmful. Ratings or scores can guide the evaluation process. School board members are able to better grasp the meaning of descriptors or numbers. These are easier to use over specific comments. Thus, ratings and scores can help to bring clarity to the evaluation of performance.

There are issues surrounding the use of ratings or scores, however. Superintendents find little value in scores; scores alone are not useful. Feedback in the form of comments is also needed and preferred. There are issues with this kind of feedback as instructional leadership is difficult to rate. Further, ratings and scores can be a distraction from the work of the system. School board members and the superintendent can understand ratings and scores differently and this can actually harm the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. Hattie and Timperley (2007) help to explain the dangers of ratings and scores further. Feedback is more effective when it is about process instead of a personal nature. Thus, it is apparent from the current research that the
scores can at times be seen as personal, especially when provided in isolation. Comments can explain ratings; scores alone cannot. Thus, the participants do have specific needs in the area of feedback.

**Feedback Needs of the Superintendent**

It was found that superintendents have specific needs when receiving feedback from school boards. Feedback can strengthen the relationship within the elements of activity theory. Feedback should focus on district goals, promote conversations, and be in the form of a narrative. This is helpful for the promotion of instructional leadership. The feedback literature aligns with the current findings. Feedback should be provided with criteria (Hardesty et al., 2014).

When discussing their needs in this area, it became apparent that not all forms of feedback should be isolated within the evaluation process. Feedback should be given consistently throughout the year, be immediate, and be provided not only through the evaluation tool. Participants reported that their compensation is based on their evaluation. Feedback that is low stakes is more helpful than the higher stakes comments provided within the evaluation documents. The feedback needs explored by the superintendents may not all lend themselves to be a part of the evaluation process. Therefore, feedback in various forms should exist outside of the formal evaluation process. This should be in the form of more acknowledgements that are frequent and less formal and in the form of a conversation.

In summary, feedback confirms the work of the superintendent, advances the vision, and furthers district goals. Superintendents value feedback that is based on mutual respect. Feedback also acknowledges the intentional work of the superintendent. Superintendents want feedback in order to gain insight into their role as instructional leaders. Feedback should connect to district
goals and outcomes. There are other factors that must be considered when exploring the superintendent evaluation and the feedback that is provided.

**Influences on the Evaluation Process and the Growth of Instructional Leadership**

It became evident during the data collection process that the evaluation and feedback cannot be examined in isolation. Other factors influence the process and the development of instructional leadership. Four themes emerged in this area: (a) relationship between the superintendent and the school board, (b) school board qualities that promote student achievement, (c) community connection to student achievement, and (d) accountability of the superintendent and school board.

**Relationship Between the Superintendent and School Board**

As the elements intersect between the subject and the community, the relationship is identified. The participants believe the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is critical. This can enhance the evaluation process and the feedback that is provided. It can also support the growth of the superintendent as an instructional leader and promote academic achievement. The relationship between the school board and the superintendent needs to be a positive one (Dervarics & O’Brien, 2011; Graham et al., 2015; Plough, 2014) and effective communication is essential (Graham et al., 2015). Further, conversations between the superintendent and the school board can build this important relationship (Graham et al., 2015). Hence, this association can facilitate the superintendent’s work to better schools; it is the relationship that matters.

The participants characterized their connections with the school board similarly to those of their leadership teams. The relationship is a positive, working partnership based on mutual trust and respect. The participants believe it is part of their role to educate the school board. The school
board is also part of the all-important team that was emphasized by the participants throughout the data collection process. Further, upon examination, the superintendents intentionally work to connect with individual school board members on a personal level to foster the relationship. The participants viewed this as their responsibility. Superintendents meet school board members where they are. Further, they understand that school board support is essential to achieve mission and district goals. Therefore, the relationship between the school board and the superintendent is affected by the qualities of the school board as a working body.

**School Board Qualities That Promote Student Achievement**

As discussed by Graham et al. (2015), the duties of the school board are focused in particular areas. Two such areas are the development of policy and the setting of goals. Another primary responsibility of the school board is the oversight of the superintendent, which includes the superintendent evaluation (Williams & Tabernik, 2011). As examined by the participants, there are specific qualities of school boards that promote student achievement. School boards must be informed about teaching and learning. As stated above, the responsibility falls to the superintendent to provide members with information about district initiatives, current research, and policies. School board meetings are a time for educating those individuals who hold the elected position. It is this education that can lead to support of district initiatives. It was found that the background and experiences of the school board members can promote instructional leadership in the superintendent and increase student achievement, but can also hinder these developments. Further, the participants reported that school board members with longer tenures tend to be more invested in, supportive of, and knowledgeable about student achievement. Hence, they may better understand the role of the superintendent as an instructional leader.
The literature identifies sound practices of school boards and supports these claims. According to Dervarics and O’Brien (2011), effective school boards understand their role in achieving student success and work towards that goal. They understand teaching and learning and make decisions based on this knowledge. There is a sense of collaboration among school board members and with the superintendent. Also, effective school boards build this positive working relationship with the superintendent and concentrate on student success (Plough, 2014). Therefore, the characteristics of the school board matter. Further, the school board has a direct connection to the community.

**Community Connections to Student Achievement**

Bredeson et al. (2012) believe one factor that affects the work of the superintendent is the political nature of the community. The school board must also form relationships with the community (Plough, 2014). The participants in the study view the relationship with the community as a valuable one. The school board is able to get the pulse of the community, identify needs, and work with the superintendent to gain support of system goals. Thus, the team approach is further needed to achieve the goals. This will ultimately increase student achievement. The superintendent and school board are accountable to the community.

**Accountability of the Superintendent and School Board**

Moreover, the superintendent evaluation can also promote a relationship with the school board and address accountability with the community (Christina, 2012). According to the participants, the greater community influences the superintendent as an instructional leader. The position of the superintendent is connected to the community. Community and accountability are interrelated; the community seeks accountability and both are connected to the success of the system. Further, within activity theory, there exists accountability in several directions in the area
of student achievement. The school board holds the superintendent accountable and the community holds the school board accountable.

**Limitations**

It is important to identify the limitations of the current body of research. The research design presented some limitations to the study. First, the researcher is a current school board member. Even though data were not collected within the same school district as the researcher, some biases were present at the beginning of the data collection about effective superintendent evaluation processes. Second, the sample was limited to superintendents in New Hampshire. Thus, the results may not be generalizable to superintendents in other states. Third, it is believed that all of the participants were high achieving, dedicated professionals. A comparison to superintendents that are not instructional leaders and purely managers of an organization was lacking. Fourth, the interviews were not structured and, therefore, the quality of the questions depended solely on the researcher’s ability to guide the discussion. Finally, the data analysis contained subjective elements found within a qualitative analysis. However, according to Smith et al. (2009), the IPA approach has theoretical transferability, as readers will be able to connect the study to their own experiences and then transfer the information to their own situations. Therefore, other school boards and superintendents can utilize the results presented here to inform the evaluation process.

**Implications for Practice**

**Instructional Leadership in School Districts**

The superintendent assumes the role of the chief instructional leader within a school district. Thus, the superintendent is not a manager of teachers, facilities, and finance, but a leader who provides the structure, support, and vision for teaching and learning within the system. Superintendents are aware of the importance of their responsibilities in ensuring student success.
Their work is intentional; it is based on reflection. The school board, district staff, and the community need to understand the true value of the superintendency within their organization. Further, the school board must also realize its role in promoting student achievement; their efforts must also be intentional. The school board must work to better understand the instructional leadership efforts of the superintendent. This is accomplished through education, communication, and collaboration with the superintendent and leadership team. One specific way this body can contribute to student success is through the superintendent evaluation, but this should be viewed as beneficial to the superintendent and the school board.

The Superintendent Evaluation and Feedback

The evaluation of any employee is of a serious nature and should be completed with thought and reflection. The superintendent evaluation is no different. What varies within this process, when compared to other positions, is the complex nature of the superintendency and the diverse experiences of the school board members who are responsible for the evaluation. The superintendent evaluation informs, provides accountability, and serves as documentation of the chief educator within a school district. The process should include agreed upon criteria, self-reflection of the superintendent, and feedback from the school board in the form of written comments or a narrative. The evaluation process must move the district forward.

School boards struggle with this process. One document cannot measure the true instructional leadership work of the superintendent. School boards must realize this. However, the evaluation process, when completed with specific criteria as the focus, can be an effective one that helps achieve goals. It is important to note, this one event does not adequately fulfill the needs of the superintendent as an instructional leader in the area of feedback. Further, opportunities for the school board to provide feedback to the superintendent abound and should be recognized. As this
research indicated, ongoing feedback throughout the year provides the needed direction to make a difference in the work of the superintendent. These points are essential for school boards to understand and then strive to improve their practices.

Feedback from the school board, within the evaluation process, can strengthen the relationship between the superintendent and the school board. Moreover, this relationship is critical to the successful attainment of school district goals and how it functions. This is a relationship that is valued and nurtured by superintendents. School board members should also assume responsibility for the development of this working relationship. Further, feedback can provide a catalyst for reflection. Reflection can occur on the part of the superintendent and the school board members. Both parties must consistently plan, implement, and reflect upon initiatives that fulfill the district’s vision. Thus, reflection must not only occur within the superintendent, but within school board members. This occurs as feedback and reflection refocus and reenergize the work of the superintendent and the school board. It is here that the superintendent and school board work as one united force to attain the established goals of the system, which, in turn, instills confidence within the organization and the community. Finally, this confidence can lead to more support and more support can lead to increased student success.

**Implications for Future Research**

The evaluation of the superintendent is multifaceted with many components to consider (Christina, 2012). There are variables that affect the process: superintendent experience, school board make-up, school district needs, and community values. The current work did not isolate these factors in regards to the sampling selection process of the participants. The current work brought to light several questions that could lend themselves to future research. How do prior experiences with curriculum and instruction, before becoming a superintendent, affect the
superintendent’s abilities as an instructional leader? How do the tenure, experiences, and background of school board members affect their ability to complete the evaluation process and provide feedback for the growth of an instructional leader? How do the needs of school districts, whether instructional or budgetary, affect the work of the superintendent and school boards, the evaluation process, and feedback? How does the influence of the community affect the evaluation process and the growth of an instructional leader? Research in these areas will facilitate the growth of the superintendent as an instructional leader, better inform school boards about the superintendent evaluation process, and help to increase student achievement by more effectively accomplishing school district goals.

**Conclusion**

The role of the superintendent is a multidimensional one (Christina, 2012; Graham et al., 2015). The factors that enable the superintendent to succeed as an instructional leader cannot be isolated. As highlighted by activity theory, the tool, subject, rules, community, division of labor, and object all connect; they are interrelated and dependent upon one another to achieve the outcome of instructional leadership. The evaluation process and feedback validate the intentional work of the superintendent. This work is promoted through continual reflection and professional growth. The evaluation of the superintendent is clearly only one event that documents the efforts of one individual within a school district. This individual, the superintendent, has a unique evaluation. In this process, a group of individuals act as one body to measure the performance of the top leader in a school district. This measurement includes a wide range of activities and components of the position, from budgetary abilities to instructional leadership. The school board members must evaluate all areas regardless of their backgrounds and experiences. Thus, there is a need to bring structure to the process.
The structure of the superintendent evaluation should be in the form of agreement among school board members and with the superintendent upon the nature of the evaluation, the purpose, and the expectations. School districts may differ in the process, timeline, and specific elements, as standardization of the process does not make it more valuable or effective. However, in order for the evaluation to meet the needs of those involved and to better the school district, it must hold the goals of the system as a central focal point. Feedback can facilitate this process.

The feedback must focus on the goals of the district and be provided effectively. Feedback that is effective is connected to performance and motivation (Guo et al., 2014; Hackman & Porter, 1968). Ultimately, this process empowers superintendents and school boards to slow down and reflect upon the teaching and learning accomplishments of their districts. This reflection and time becomes a thoughtful exercise in documenting the intentional work of the superintendent as an instructional leader. This is only one event or one form of communication. It is a critical form of communication as it can facilitate the growth of a positive, working relationship between the superintendent and the school board. Further, the communication between the superintendent and the school board must reach well beyond the evaluation and be infused into the daily interactions of the individuals. Thus, the feedback within the superintendent evaluation process can promote instructional leadership within the superintendent. This may be an indirect connection, but it is an important one, as it is the relationship between the superintendent and the school board that can accomplish the work of the district, attain goals, and ultimately promote student achievement.

This research has provided a vehicle for improved practice and growth. As a scholar-practitioner, I was able to structure a study that can be used to better the work of my fellow school board members across the state of New Hampshire. It is through this research that I better
understand the need to continuously analyze and reflect on my efforts as a school board member and my relationships with district administrators to ensure success within the system.
REFERENCES


http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Public-education/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards/Eight-characteristics-of-effective-school-boards.html


doi:10.1016/learninstruc.2011.10.003


Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Date

Dear Superintendent X,

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and provide you with an overview of a research study that I am completing with New Hampshire superintendents. As a doctoral student at Northeastern University, I will be completing my dissertation work this fall. The study is designed to examine meaningful feedback within the superintendent evaluation process that fosters instructional leadership and promotes student achievement. I am hoping to work with 10 volunteers from New Hampshire. As a current school board member in Salem, I understand the need for meaningful feedback within the superintendent performance evaluation. I have over 25 years of experience as a New Hampshire educator and I want to contribute to an area that will support student achievement and improve practice. I currently serve as Chair of the Education Department at Great Bay Community College in Portsmouth.

Participation in the research study will include review of the evaluation tool, and a three-part interview. The first brief meeting will be approximately 20 minutes and serve as an introduction and means to gain consent for the study. The second meeting will be approximately 90 minutes and consist of the actual interview questions. The final meeting will be between 15-90 minutes and serve to review the interview data and ask any follow up questions. All information attained from the research will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used on all documents.

As a superintendent, your insights are viewed as valuable to this research. It is my hope that you will agree to participate in this work in order to contribute to the quality of the superintendent evaluation process and provide school board members with needed assistance in the area of feedback. Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not volunteer, you will not be contacted again regarding this research.

I would like to thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any questions or would like to volunteer to participate, please contact me at my student email corbett.p@husky.neu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia Corbett

Patricia Corbett, MEd
(603) 401-5606
corbett.p@husky.neu.edu
Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter

Northeastern University, Department of Education
Principal Investigator: Dr. Kelly Conn    Student Researcher: Patricia Corbett
Title of Project: The Role of Feedback within the Superintendent Evaluation Process

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a current or recently retired school superintendent in New Hampshire.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to examine the nature of feedback in the superintendent evaluation process. What feedback helps superintendents to become instructional leaders?

What will I be asked to do?
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in three separate sessions with the student researcher.
- The first brief meeting will be to gather specific demographic information and receive informed consent for participation in the research.
- The subsequent meeting will consist of a conversation about your evaluation process. At this time, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences about the superintendent evaluation process and the feedback you have received.
- The final session will be to check the accuracy of the statements provided and to ask any additional questions.

The dates and times of the interview sessions will be based on your schedule and at your convenience. The interview will occur at a location selected by you. The student researcher will also review the current evaluation tool. Pseudonyms will be used to promote confidentiality.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?
Participants will select the location, date and time of the sessions. The first session will be approximately 20 minutes. The second session will be approximately 90 minutes. The final session will last between 15-90 minutes.
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<th><strong>Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?</strong></th>
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<td>There is no foreseeable risk or discomfort anticipated.</td>
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<th><strong>Will I benefit by being in this research?</strong></th>
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<td>There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help provide insight into the superintendent evaluation process and contribute to the body of knowledge on feedback and the superintendent evaluation.</td>
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<th><strong>Who will see the information about me?</strong></th>
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<td>Your participation in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.</td>
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Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym (A, B, C, etc.). The pseudonym will be used on all documents and recording for the research. Any information that must be shared with Northeastern faculty will be done so using the pseudonym. The audio recordings of the interviews will not reveal the identity of the participants. The transcription service used will only have access to the audio recordings of the interviews. The data will be used to code and then draw conclusions on the proposed hypothesis for the completion of the researcher’s dissertation. The data will be destroyed one year after the completion of the work.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board.

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<th><strong>What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?</strong></th>
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<td>No physical, psychological, social, or financial harm is anticipated as a result of participation in this research. No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of your participation in this research.</td>
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<th><strong>Can I stop my participation in this study?</strong></th>
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<td>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you do not volunteer, you will not be contacted again regarding this research. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time.</td>
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<th><strong>Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?</strong></th>
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<td>If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Patricia Corbett at (603) 401-5606 or at <a href="mailto:corbett.p@huskey.neu.edu">corbett.p@huskey.neu.edu</a>, the individual primarily responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Kelly Conn at (857) 205-9585 or <a href="mailto:k.conn@neu.edu">k.conn@neu.edu</a>, the Principal Investigator.</td>
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<td><strong>Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?</strong></td>
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<td>If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: <a href="mailto:n.regina@neu.edu">n.regina@neu.edu</a>. You may call anonymously if you wish.</td>
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<th><strong>Will I be paid for my participation?</strong></th>
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<td>No monetary compensation will be provided to the participants in any form.</td>
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<th><strong>Will it cost me anything to participate?</strong></th>
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<td>No costs will be incurred by the participants.</td>
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<th><strong>Is there anything else I need to know?</strong></th>
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<td>All participants will be recently retired or current superintendents in the State of New Hampshire.</td>
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**Signature of person agreeing to take part**  
**Date**

**Printed name of person above**

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**Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent**  
**Date**

**Printed name of person above**

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Appendix C

Interview Protocol

I would like to take this time to thank you for participating in the interview process. Our work together will consist of three separate meetings. The first session will consist of general questions about your practice and superintendency. The second meeting will consist of specific questions about your performance evaluation and the feedback you receive within the evaluation process. In the final session, we will review your responses and you will be provided the opportunity to change and add any information. The questions are open-ended and there are no right or wrong responses. Your insights are valuable to this study. You are encouraged to answer honestly. At any time, you may stop the interview, take a break, or ask for clarification on the questions. You may also choose not to respond to any of the questions. I will review the consent form with you and ask that if you agree, you sign the form and date it. I would also like to audio record this interview for accuracy. Do I have your permission to do this?

Do you have any questions for me?

Interview One

1. How long have you been a superintendent? Tell me about the school districts you have been a part of during your career.

2. Discuss the hierarchy within your current school board. What is the make up of the board?

3. Discuss your school board and some of the processes you have in place for working together.

4. What is the nature of your evaluation process? How does it work? What tool is used for the performance review? Do you have documentation of the process I can review?
Interview Two

1. What is your role as the superintendent of schools in raising student achievement within your district?

2. What is the school board’s role in raising student achievement within the school district?

3. What training do school board members in your district receive? Is the superintendent evaluation part of any professional development that they receive? How does this impact their role in completing the evaluation process?

4. Describe the language used on your evaluation and the feedback you receive within the process. Can you provide some examples?

5. Describe the feedback that you believe to be meaningful to your growth as an instructional leader. Can you provide a specific example of helpful feedback you received?

6. Overall, how effective is the tool used for your performance evaluation in raising your job performance, specifically in the area of instructional leadership?

7. How does your growth as an instructional leader influence student achievement? Do you see this growth affected by your performance evaluation?

These are all of the questions I have. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you for your time and participation. I will send you a transcribed copy of this interview for your review and feedback.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.