

MAINTAINING THE PERSONAL, PHYSICAL, AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS OF
RURAL SUPERINTENDENTS

by

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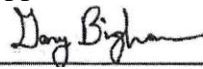
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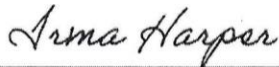
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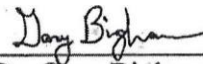
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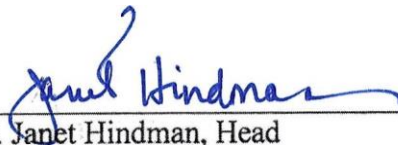
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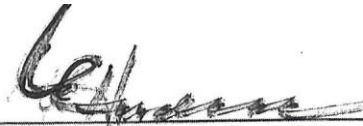
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Abstract

Purpose: Several studies directly related to wellness in leadership were reviewed, but few dealt with superintendent well-being and even fewer addressed rural superintendent wellness. The purpose of this study was (a) to identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents in Texas, which have emerged as stressors; (b) to investigate personal health and wellness; and (c) to identify tools, skills, and coping mechanisms that correlate with job satisfaction, and demographic and biographic variables. **Research Design:** Using an exploratory-descriptive research design with quantitative analysis, this study included both traditional statistical reasoning methods and Grice's (2014) Oriented Observation Modeling (OOM). Data from 113 rural Texas superintendents were examined using the traditional calculation of effect size, p -values, and Cramer's V , and the OOM analyses for data comparison. **Findings:** Most participating rural superintendents reported being in good to excellent health, with few who reported having a major medical illness based on job stress. Additionally, all participants reported some level of stress while serving as a superintendent. Moreover, all participants reported talking to colleagues or other superintendents to some degree or another as a coping mechanism. A large portion of rural Texas superintendents identified as being quite and extremely satisfied with their jobs. **Implications:** This study could assist practitioners, professional organizations, and universities in rethinking preparation programs. Moreover, universities could deliver programs that prepare aspiring superintendents for rural settings and instills ways to promote increased job satisfaction.

Keywords: rural superintendents, stress, wellness, coping mechanisms, p -value, Observation Oriented Modeling (OOM)



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
Letter of Approval

March 15, 2021

Dr. Bigham:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2021.03.004 for your study titled, **“The Wellness of Rural Texas Superintendents,”** meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Human Subject Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **March 14, 2022.**

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a [Close out form](#) must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR](#), unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to [SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR](#), potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an [Amendment form](#) to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining

complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.

8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format:
WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ##/##/#### Expiration Date: ##/##/####.
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an [Amendment/Continuation/Close out](#) form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Spaulding". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Angela" and last name "Spaulding" clearly distinguishable.

Dr. Angela Spaulding
Vice President of Research and Compliance

Dedication

La defensa del entregable académico fue dedicada a mi Mamí, Victoria Reyna Torres, quien me enseñó a ser una mujer de gran fe, a servir a los demás, cómo hacer algo de nada, ser segura de quien soy, soportar el calor y además, como ¡Bailar y descansar mis pies en el fuego!

¡TE AMO MAMÍ!

My Scholarly Deliverable Defense was dedicated to my Mamí, Victoria Reyna Torres, who taught me to be a woman of great faith, how to make something out of nothing, to serve others, to be secure in who I am, to take the heat, moreover, to dance in and rest my feet in the fire!

I LOVE YOU, *MAMÍ!*

My entire Ed.D. Portfolio is dedicated to my husband and youngest son.

Robert, you have been with me through this entire process. Not only have you been my rock but at times even my salvation! Ezekiel, you have been so understanding and have truly sacrificed having a Momma for the past three years so that I could reach this milestone. You have both been such a blessing to me on this journey.

LOOKS LIKE WE MADE IT!

Acknowledgement

It has been a long-time goal and dream of mine to earn a doctorate. A flame that was sparked by my Daddy, the late Cornelio Miguel Castañeda, who instilled the value of an education in me from an early age and believed I could do or become anything I wanted. Ignited by my best friend and husband, Robert Aranda, Jr., you stood by me through this entire journey, even when it seemed unbearable. Fanned by my Flossy Posse, Laura Rodriguez Montemayor, Teresa Valdez Pérez, and Yolanda Chávez Saucedá, you influenced me, cheered me on, and prayed for me. Fueled by my sons and daughter-in-law, Ezekiel James Aranda, Nicholas Robert Aranda, and Matthew James and Lauren Michelle Peña, you urged me on and kept me in prayer.

A special thank you to those who served as keepers of the flame by providing encouragement and support when times were challenging. My *Mamá*, Victoria Reyna Torres, our pastor and close friend, Fr. John (Reverend John H. Valdez), and Rebecca Conrad Vincent, you never let me give up. But, most especially *Mis Chicas*, Angelica Garcia Okamoto, Gabriela Arriazola Rivera, and Liz Rascón Alaniz, I would not have made it through to the end without you. *Chicas*, you are such remarkable women, and we have made life-long friendships. *Que bendicida soy. Prometimos empujarnos, jalarnos o arrastrarnos por el escenario y nunca nos dimos por vencidos. ¡Le echamos ganas y seguimos adelante!*

Great appreciation goes to special individuals who have supported me professionally and personally throughout my career as an educator and this doctoral process. Mr. George Ochs, you believed I would one day make an excellent educational leader. Mr. Mark Stokes, you constantly challenged me and made me a better teacher.

Mr. Terry Russell, you provided support and advised me on all matters dealing with facilities and maintenance in my first years as an administrator. My childhood friends, Chad Fitzgerald and Randy Villarreal, you greatly influenced the direction my life would take. Bless you! Ann, Angela, and Christine, you modeled true servant leadership. Clarabeth and Helen for championing the higher education of a Latina. A shout out to those who have served as my *padrinos*, *madrinas*, or fairy godmothers for my Doctorate Regalia. Fr. John Valdez, Argelia, Terry, Lauri, Mark, Jill, Elva, Ann, Julie, Judy, Mary Ann, my Momma, and my three brothers John David, Raymond, and Carlos Castañeda, you helped make my dream come true. Bless you!

A huge thank you to those who provided knowledge, wisdom, and guidance my Chair, Dr. Gary Bigham, and committee members, Dr. Mark Garrison, my methodologist, and Dr. Irma Harper. Dr. Bigham, bless you for your words of encouragement, your faith in me, for continuously challenging, but most especially for your unending prayers. You have become a supportive colleague, mentor, and most importantly, a friend. I have the utmost respect for you as a professor and as a man of great faith! Thank you!

Dr. Garrison, I do not know how I would have made it through the process of my data analysis without you, let alone finished my scholarly deliverable. Thank you for the hours of instruction and the dedication you committed to my study. Bless you! Dr. Harper, your teaching methods and mastery of APA have been a godsend. Thank you all for providing welcomed feedback and for graciously agreeing to serve on my committee. I have been blessed with the best!

Please know that I carry a piece of you all with me as I walk across the stage.


Ultimately, may all that I do be done for the greater glory of God! AMDG! 

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Introduction

This final composite scholarly delivery explores the stress, coping mechanisms, and wellness among rural superintendents through three different artifacts. Each artifact has its own title page, abstract, keywords, content, and references. The first artifact, is an empirical study of common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents in Texas, which emerged as stressors, to investigate personal health and wellness, and identify tools, skills, and coping mechanisms that correlate with job satisfaction. The second artifact is a case study that can be used for teaching doctoral or master's candidates in the field of educational leadership. This case study, written as a submission to the *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, introduces three rural superintendents each in a unique context with dilemmas and experiences, and a multitude of complex problems that are considered relevant and practical. The final artifact that served as a qualifying exam, is a systematic review that investigated the selected problem of practice: to identify and synthesize the empirical research on common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents, which emerged as stressors and the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which in turn affects their decision making and job performance.

Stress, Coping Mechanisms, and Wellness Among Rural Superintendents

by

Linda Gail Aranda, B.A., M.Ed.

Scholarly Deliverable II

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Abstract

Purpose: Several studies directly related to wellness in leadership were reviewed, but few dealt with superintendent well-being, and even fewer addressed rural superintendent wellness. The purpose of this study was (a) to identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents in Texas, which have emerged as stressors; (b) to investigate personal health and wellness; and (c) to identify tools, skills, and coping mechanisms that correlate with job satisfaction, and demographic and biographic variables. **Research Design:** Using an exploratory-descriptive research design with quantitative analysis, this study included both traditional statistical reasoning methods and Grice's (2014) Oriented Observation Modeling (OOM). Data from 113 rural Texas superintendents were examined using the traditional calculation of effect size, p -values, and Cramer's V , and the OOM analyses for data comparison. **Findings:** Most participating rural superintendents reported being in good to excellent health, with few who reported having a major medical illness based on job stress. Additionally, all participants reported some level of stress while serving as a superintendent. Moreover, all participants reported talking to colleagues or other superintendents to some degree or another as a coping mechanism. A large portion of rural Texas superintendents identified as being quite and extremely satisfied with their jobs. **Implications:** This study could assist practitioners, professional organizations, and universities in rethinking preparation programs. Moreover, universities could deliver programs that prepare aspiring superintendents for rural settings and instill ways to promote increased job satisfaction.

Keywords: rural superintendents, stress, wellness, coping mechanisms, p -value, Observation Oriented Modeling (OOM)

Stress, Coping Mechanisms, and Wellness Among Rural Superintendents

School superintendents go through a myriad of on-the-job demands and pressures. The ultimate actions and reactions to the expectations, challenges, and stressors in rural superintendencies play a role in their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, potentially impacting their overall health, job satisfaction, and performance. Researchers found that rural superintendents described their work as being a jack of all trades (Lamkin, 2006), being the center of the wheel (Hyle et al., 2010), and the go-to persons for everything in the district (Canales et al., 2008).

Many studies in the literature associate the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of superintendents with job-related stress (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006; Tekniepe, 2015). High demands, stressors, and pressures of the superintendency necessitate that superintendents maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, or risk health-related issues, possibly including experience burnout and leaving the district, or even the profession of education (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Sogunro, 2012; Tekniepe, 2015). Other studies have addressed ways superintendents have managed their overall personal, physical, and emotional wellness impacted by these stressors (Bell, 2019; Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016).

An image of the small, rural school superintendency helps one understand the pressures, stressors, and demands related to the impact of a superintendent's overall health. As indicated by Robinson and Shakeshaft (2016), there is a need to draw attention to the stressors of the superintendency coping mechanisms and health and wellness programs. "We must help those who are suffering, but we must do more by preventing

distress where we can and building on positive, strength factors where possible” (Rossi et al., 2009, as cited in Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016, p. 130).

Statement of the Problem

The literature reported research that discussed superintendents' roles, responsibilities, and expectations contributing to job-related stressors. Several studies directly related to wellness in leadership were reviewed; only four dealt with superintendent well-being, with only one concerning rural superintendent wellness. This telling illustrates a gap in the empirical literature on superintendents maintaining their personal health and wellness. The majority of research on coping mechanisms and strategies for stress management and wellness in leadership was focused on the principalship, with few dedicated to the rural superintendency. Interestingly, research suggested that superintendents who hold doctoral degrees have more years of experience and job satisfaction associated with (a) less stress, pressures, and workload, (b) frequent use of coping mechanisms, (c) maintaining good health habits, and (d) having higher total leadership effectiveness (Allison, 1997; Boyland, 2011; Yates & De Jong, 2018).

The literature confirmed that there is a high level of stress among superintendents. The problem is that stress is anticipated to detract from job satisfaction and the effectiveness of the school superintendents (small, rural school superintendents in particular), but it is not known how stressed they are nor how well they cope with stress to moderate the effects on health and wellness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was (a) to identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents in Texas, which have emerged as

stressors; (b) to investigate personal health and wellness; and (c) to identify tools, skills, and coping mechanisms that correlate with job satisfaction, and demographic and biographic variables. This study contributes to knowledge about stress, coping, and wellness, and from its findings, offers possible recommendations for rural superintendency preparation programs and further studies of stress management and wellness. The purpose was addressed through the following research questions:

1. Is there an association between superintendents' self-reported coping mechanisms and self-reported health conditions?
2. Is there an association between superintendents' self-reported coping mechanisms and reported job satisfaction?
3. Is there an association between superintendents' level of education, years of superintendency experience, and gender and their reported coping mechanisms, health and wellness?
4. Is there an association between superintendents' reported job satisfaction and self-reported level of stress?

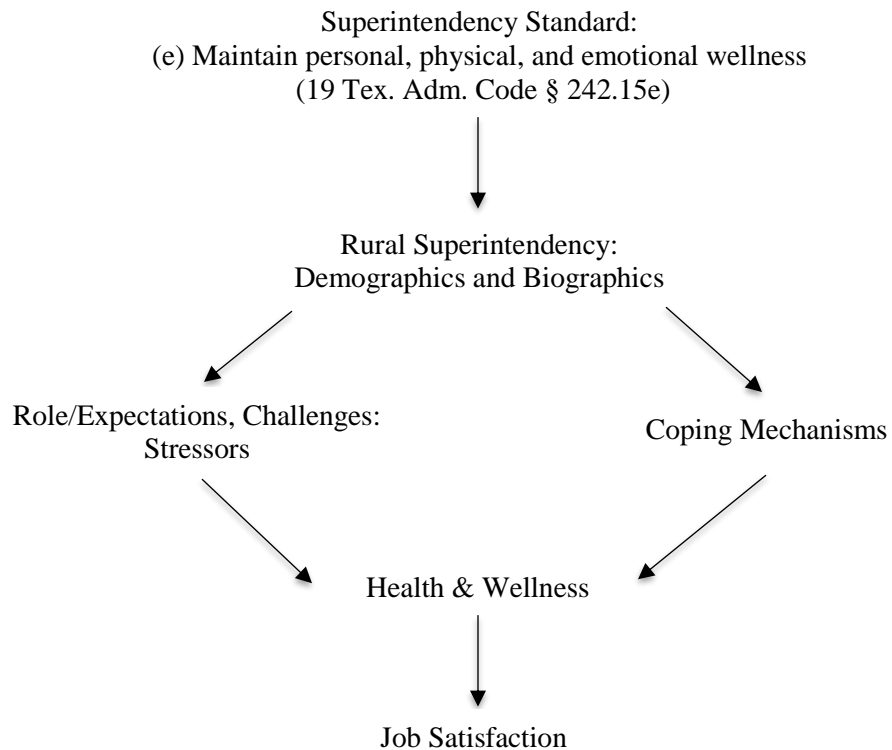
Conceptual Framework

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), a conceptual framework is defined as “An argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriated and rigorous” (p. 351). The empirical research and literature review presented in Figure 1 established the conceptual framework for this quantitative study. The literature review determined the importance of investigating roles, expectations, and challenges of the rural superintendency that emerged as stressors and the need to investigate personal health and wellness and identify coping mechanisms

utilized by rural Texas superintendents. The framework is demonstrated by the development and alignment of the research questions to explore the associations of coping mechanisms, health and wellness, levels of stress, and job satisfaction, justifying the quantitative design selection. Rural Texas superintendents responded to a questionnaire, and responses were analyzed using traditional statistics and OOM.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Review of Literature

Superintendency

As chief executive officer of schools, the superintendent has an essential leadership position (Boyland, 2011). The position of superintendent of schools “has the

potential for such a big impact on a school district” (Nix & Bigham, 2015, p. 54). When asked what motivated them, superintendents reported the following in the top three: making a difference, providing leadership, and moving the district forward (Bell, 2019).

In early leadership literature, the effectiveness of superintendents was characterized as “strong and in charge; teachers, school board members, and community members rarely challenged their decisions” (Klatt, 2014, p. 456). However, over time, there has been an evolution in expected shared decision-making (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Tekniepe, 2015), in serving as chief financial officer and instructional leader (Bigham & Nix, 2011; Jones, 2012), and in influencing vision as a visionary leader (Bigham & Nix, 2011). All of these practices play a vital role in public school superintendency.

Superintendency Standards. Superintendents in Texas are required to complete an approved superintendent educator preparation program and meet state requirements set by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for superintendent certification (TEA, 2020b). Standards for Texas superintendent certification consist of eight learner-centered standards. The eight learner-centered standards include values and ethics of leadership, leadership and district culture, human resources leadership and management, policy and governance, communications and community relations, organizational leadership and management, planning and development, and instructional leadership and management. This review of literature highlights the learner-centered standard for values and ethics of leadership, which states, “A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. A superintendent understands values and is able to: (e) Maintain personal, physical, and

emotional wellness” (19 Tex. Adm. Code § 242.15e). Unfortunately, this standard has little research in the rural superintendency of Texas.

Jones (2012) examined the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas. Findings revealed that the entry period to a new superintendency is critical, a plan is essential, preparation programs are necessary, as are opportunities for professional development. During the entry period, practical activities included analyzing a district’s budget and student achievement data, assistance from other colleagues, and working with stakeholders and leadership teams. Interestingly, the development of an entry plan did not include the superintendency standard related to maintaining personal wellness.

Rural Superintendency. In Texas, 48.7% of school districts are considered small rural with “the nation’s largest rural student enrollment, with nearly 700,000 total students” (Showalter et al., 2019, p. 136). Texas rural school districts are identified as districts with enrollment between 300 and the state median with an enrollment growth rate of less than 20% over a 5-year period or enrollment of fewer than 300 students (TEA, 2020e). TEA classifies districts into nine categories, and rural schools are further differentiated by proximity into the following categorizations rural distant, rural fringe, and rural remote (TEA, 2020c, d).

Rural schools are unique in that not only do they provide an education but are considered the heart of the community, are also usually the largest employer, and “provide economic support” (Tekniepe, 2015, p. 1). Therefore, personal visibility, relationships in rural communities, and community involvement are significant to the rural superintendency (Lamkin, 2006). Additionally, Budge (2006) shared rural leaders’

belief of the need to understand the mindset of community members' expectations of superintendents' "willingness to be highly visible, accessible, and approachable" (p. 7). Furthermore, Barley and Beesley (2007) concluded that without a school, there would not be a community as the school is "the heartbeat of this community" (p. 8).

Grissom and Anderson (2012) reiterated the role of superintendent as chief executive and found urban districts have more success hiring experienced superintendents than rural. One of the distinctions included administrative assistance levels with no options for delegation or separation from daily concerns (Lamkin, 2006). "The biggest differences between the rural superintendent and the urban superintendent is the transparency in the leadership and the visibility of the superintendent in the community" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 3).

Roles and Expectations. The role of a small, rural school superintendent often goes beyond that of executive, organizer, listener, communicator, and active community member (Copeland, 2013). These small, rural executive leaders regularly fulfill multiple administrative and non-administrative functions. For example, superintendents shared "how one minute they were on the phone with the Texas Education Agency dealing with a funding issue and the next minute they were dealing with a plumbing problem in the boys' restroom" (Canales et al., 2010, p. 4). Superintendents' roles and role confusion deal with their role as leader and their role as manager (Lamkin, 2006), the role-played in developing a positive school climate for student success (Mahfouz, 2018), and even the dual role of superintendent and principal and role assumption (Canales et al., 2008). Other complexities deal with board relations, conflict, and power struggles.

“As the role and expectations of the superintendency change, the pressures also tend to change and become more complex” (Hendricks, 2013, p. 63). The expectations placed on small, rural school superintendents typically exceed those placed on urban school superintendents by stakeholders in their respective educational communities (Copeland, 2013; Jones, 2012; Litchka et al., 2009). Through interviews with superintendents and board members on the topics of rural school superintendents’ roles, the many hats they wear, and the expected differences between urban and rural school superintendents, Copeland (2013) found that of the school board members interviewed, “none expected a superintendent of a larger district to perform those tasks, but all expected their own superintendent to do so if needed” (p. 8). Moreover, rural superintendents were expected to perform many additional duties, including cafeteria workers, substitute teachers, and janitors (Copeland, 2013). Isernhagen and Bulkin (2013) contended, “Clear and defined roles for the superintendent and board of education are essential to the development of a strong working relationship” (p. 117).

Garn (2003) found several similarities between a comparative study of national survey data and the Oklahoma data on rural superintendents’ characteristics and problems. Surprisingly, Garn determined that 10% of rural superintendents surveyed were teaching one or more classes in their district. Furthermore, 24% served in a dual superintendent/principal role, which did not coincide with their urban and suburban counterparts. Jones (2012) reiterated rural superintendents’ role as more important and challenging to execute with the demanding increase of accountability and expectations. Jones claimed perceived realities set some expectations. Consequently, superintendents wear many hats; some are worn voluntarily while others are forced to be worn (Copeland,

2013).

Challenges. The pressures of the managerial responsibilities and the challenges of the added duties of a small, rural school superintendency can be exhausting. Schools located in extremely rural and isolated areas tend to encounter specific difficulties (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2013). Many challenges that affect rural leadership and exist in rural schools are not present in urban area schools, such as geographic isolation, cultural isolation, poor working conditions for teachers (Budge, 2006), lack of resources, and increased accountability (Bell, 2019), and community issues (Garn, 2003), access to technology and transportation sparsity (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011), as well as high poverty levels, wide-ranging job responsibilities, and having a significant public role (Forner et al., 2012). The most significant challenges facing superintendents included difficulty obtaining highly qualified teachers, lack of funding, curriculum and instruction issues, followed by political and governance issues (Treviño et al., 2008).

Serving as a solo administrator or in a dual role of superintendent/principal “places a large amount of wear and tear on administrators” (Canales et al., 2010, p. 2). Lamkin (2006) examined multiple challenges faced by rural superintendents. They found that rural superintendents served as sole administrators with a lack of training and little privacy, “rural superintendents suffer a unique lack of privacy; they enjoy little private life and come under scrutiny for everything that they do at school and in other settings” (p. 17).

Other challenging aspects of the superintendency include lack of family time and navigating politics (Yates & De Jong, 2018). In addition, Budge (2006) studied the influence of rurality as problem, privilege, or possibility. Superintendents expressed that

the expectation of “encouraging schools to nurture students” to move from rurality as problem to possibility “simply adds to the long ‘to do’ list currently demanded” (Budge, 2006, p. 9). These challenges and other rural leadership challenges lead to stressors, impacting health and wellness, job satisfaction, and overall performance effectiveness. All of these challenges require specialized training (Lamkin, 2006).

Stressors. In addition to rural superintendency challenges, detrimental stressors emerged as a theme found in the literature. Many studies in the literature correlate the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of superintendents with job-related stress (Canales et al., 2013; Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006; Tekniepe, 2015). The definition of stress/job stress for this study was taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as defined by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. “Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (CDC, 2014, What is job stress? Section, para, 1). Although stressors can be both beneficial and detrimental, this review focused on the adverse effects of negative stress (Hawk & Martin, 2011). Nix and Bigham (2015) conducted a phenomenological inquiry of the critical skills necessary for the interim superintendency, asserted, “The interim must understand the potential stresses involved” as the “position of superintendent is largely seen as equivalent to the CEO of a business with all the accompanying stressors and has the potential to exhaust the administrator” (p. 57).

An early review of perceived stressors’ impact on administrative health led Gmelch and Swent (1982) to specifically develop the Administrative Stress Index (ASI). Superintendents perceived more stress from complying with rules and policies than the

other subgroups, followed by gaining public approval. Wholly, “more than 60% reported that at least 70% of their total life stress resulted from their job” (Gmelch & Swent, 1982, p. 18). In their quest to identify on-the-job stressors of administrators serving in dual roles of superintendent and principal in small, rural schools, Canales et al. (2010) identified several on the job stressors inherent of the sole administrator’s roles, the lack of time to complete all daily tasks, constantly feeling rushed, and superintendents feeling they are not doing anything well. Additionally, Hyle et al. (2010) discovered that superintendents felt stressed about learning to manage their responsibilities and multiple roles in small rural schools. When asked what caused the most on-the-job stress, the superintendents’ average response was changes in federal and state policies, time demands, and a lack of school funding (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). Other administrators reported stressors included the time required by the job and a work-life balance struggle (Mahfouz, 2018), being an outsider in a small rural community (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015), the use of social media for district communication, and participating in after-hour activities at the expense of personal time (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016; Sogunro, 2012). Again, rural administrators were found to have higher average stress levels than suburban and urban.

Richardson (1998) explored sources of stress among superintendents. The study found that major stressors significantly affect superintendents’ personal and professional lives, producing feelings of anger, resentment, frustration, and anxiety. Furthermore, along with negative feelings experienced by the superintendents were the depressive feelings expressed. Klatt (2014) mentioned, “Studies report that current superintendents experience higher levels of stress than their predecessors did” (p. 478). According to

Glass and Franceschini (2007), the amount of stress that leaders face is increasing and can become “a disabling condition affecting behavior, judgment, and performance” (p.47).

Lefdal and De Jong (2019) used a survey that rated factors of perceived superintendent stress and coping methods for reducing stress. Factors superintendents perceived as most stressful included high self-expectations, evening activities, increased paperwork and reporting, collective bargaining, role ambiguity, and constraints of board policy. They found, “School superintendents in districts with fewer than 500 students felt more stress than districts with more than 1,000 students” (p. 63). High levels of stress were found to pose mental and physical health consequences (Boyland, 2011), affect work habits and productivity (Sogunro, 2012), heighten frustration and anxiety (Beisser et al., 2014), and permeate one’s personal, home, and spiritual life (Klatt, 2014). Gmelch and Swent (1982) contended, “An increase in stress was associated with poor self-reported physical health” (p. 26). Therefore, it is essential to study rural superintendency stressors and coping mechanisms that impact wellness and effectiveness. Maintaining their well-being, therefore, is crucial to promoting job satisfaction and effective performance.

Health and Wellness. Researchers compared levels of stress to health levels, as superintendents reported that the most significant impact of stress was on their physical health, mental health, and spousal relationships (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015, 2016). This study’s definition of health and wellness came from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) and the National Wellness Institute (NWI, 2020). The WHO defined *health* as “a state of complete physical, mental and social

wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2020, What is the WHO definition of health? Section, para. 1). The NWI promotes six dimensions of wellness as emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual (NWI, 2020). Sackney et al. (2000) contended that total health and well-being are contingent on a balance of all six dimensions of wellness. A significance of Lefdal and De Jong’s (2019) study noted attention to employee wellness as the answer to decreasing health care costs in a time of increased expenses in educational settings.

Williams et al. (2019) examined the perceived barriers, challenges, and opportunities experienced by 10 rural superintendents in Idaho. One of the most significant factors that influenced their decision to stay or leave a school district included work-life balance. Examples of work-life balance shared by superintendents included being in a public role in a rural community and its impact on their families. One superintendent offered this advice, “A person should do some soul searching before accepting a superintendent situation. You and your family have to be okay with living in the fishbowl” (Williams et al., 2019, p. 10). Others shared how often a superintendent “sacrifices their own family for other people’s families and that a board that supports a superintendent’s home life is a positive for superintendent health” (p. 11).

A national study addressing superintendents’ stress and well-being was conducted by Robinson and Shakeshaft (2016). A newly appointed superintendent shared his experience saying, “I developed high blood pressure, gout, and diabetes over the first three years. I could not understand why anyone did this job” (p. 127). Another superintendent disclosed, “I have constant neck, jaw, and shoulder pain in addition to decreasing cardiovascular fitness due to no time for exercise. I also have no time for

socializing or relaxing” (p. 127). When asked if they were concerned about developing health conditions, the top three health issues reported were heart attack (21%), anxiety (20.9%), and heart disease (20.6%).

“McCurdy and Hymes (1992) proposed that the demands of the position may be such that many superintendents are worn down and leave their jobs under duress,” thus affirming the need to maintain overall health and wellness (as cited in Tekniepe, 2015, p. 1). Beisser et al. (2014) contended that even though principals shared their passion for their administrative roles, their comments suggested a gap between knowing what to do about health and wellness and doing it. “Ultimately, the students served by educators should be the beneficiaries of a better understanding of educator wellness” (Sackney et al., 2000, p. 54). Therefore, it is essential to understand the stress levels, health conditions, and the means superintendents use to improve overall wellness and resilience.

Coping Mechanisms. The literature suggested that rural superintendents play a unique role in their profession and are impacted by on-the-job stressors, and therefore need to find methods of dealing with stress for their overall health and wellness. Sogunro (2012) contended that an “administrators’ lack of stress-coping techniques is akin to a soldier who knows how to fight but is not knowledgeable and skillful about how to defend himself or herself. Such a soldier may not return from the battlefield alive!” (p. 666). Klocko et al. (2019) conducted a two-phase study; the first phase found superintendents rarely expressed their feelings of anxiety or took the time to engage in stress-reducing activities.

Older, more tenured administrators were found to be able to manage the stressors and strain of the job through intentional lifestyle and health choices, or from their

experiences, could find a balance by separating work and self (Beisser et al., 2014). However, a more significant gap existed among younger aged and earlier career years, where administrators were less able to accomplish a healthy balance. Researchers also concluded that superintendents who hold doctoral degrees, have higher levels of education, and have more years of experience were associated with less stress, pressures, and workload, frequent use of coping mechanisms, maintained good health habits, and have higher total leadership effectiveness (Allison, 1997; Boyland, 2011; Yates & De Jong, 2018).

Beisser et al. (2014) also noted an implied relationship between stress levels and lifestyle behaviors. Those who were seldom stressed engaged in contact with other administrators, pursued personal interests, and practiced healthy eating habits. Superintendents should be able to identify the source of harmful stress in addition to finding effective coping mechanisms for success (Litchka et al., 2009). Moreover, Tekniepe (2015) stated, “Superintendents should learn how to interpret and predict the political landscape---both internal and external and adjust accordingly” (p. 10).

Lefdal and De Jong (2019) mentioned coping strategies and hobbies that included humor, daily to-do lists, and quality time with family, relying on peers, socializing, exercising, and finding a balance. Jones (2012) found having a personal vision for education as a successful tool when transitioning into the role of a new superintendent in Texas. Hawk and Martin (2011) determined that networking with peers assisted in decision-making and problem solving, exercising and getting away alleviated stress, and seeking guidance or a mentor as effective coping strategies. Other tools, skills, and coping mechanisms included keeping a realistic perspective, and maintaining a positive

attitude (Allison, 1997), spending time with loved ones, and having an outlet outside work (Mahfouz, 2018), and interacting with the students (Beisser et al., 2014). It was additionally noted that building a relationship with board members/stakeholders (Williams et al., 2019), seeking support and having a personal mission statement (Sogunro, 2012) were critical.

Hawk and Martin (2011) pointed out that stress levels lessen when coping behaviors are effective. Canales et al. (2010) had a final question in their study regarding the techniques or strategies they used in dealing with the stress administrators encountered. One stress coping strategy utilized by five of the ten superintendents/principals interviewed was their strong faith. Superintendents interviewed credited prayer, God, and faith as ultimate stress relievers. The need for superintendents to maintain their physical, psychological, spiritual, and ethical well-being for themselves and others should be of concern to all stakeholders. The key, then, is to find the right balance, discover what works, and seek strategies and tools to cope with the demands and stressors that will impact overall health and wellness, as well as job satisfaction and performance.

Method

Research Design

This quantitative study utilized an exploratory-descriptive research design with quantitative analysis of superintendents' self-reported health and well-being, stress, coping strategies, and demographic and biographic data. Traditional statistical reasoning methods and Grice's (2014) OOM, an analysis of individual level data to determine patterns was employed. Grice introduced OOM as an alternative to traditional statistical

reasoning, which according to Grice, should be avoided. Instead, patterns of observations should be “examined in light of a causal model using analysis techniques that are relatively free of assumptions and yield results that are both transparent and interpretable at the level of the individuals in the study” (p. 2).

Population

The target population for this quantitative study was practicing superintendents of small, rural public schools in Texas. Each participant in this study had to meet the following set of criteria: (a) serve a school district defined as rural remote by Texas Education Agency (TEA) and (b) serve a school district with an enrollment less than or equal to 600. For this study, rural school districts were identified using the TEA and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) classification system, “Rural – Remote.” “Census-defined rural territory is more than 25 miles from an Urbanized Area and also more than 10 miles from an Urban Cluster” (TEA, 2020c). A population of 352 rural Texas school districts met the eligibility criteria for inclusion in this study.

Data Collection

An electronic invitation to participate in the study was emailed to 352 small, rural superintendents throughout Texas. Recipients were asked to complete an anonymous, online, four-part questionnaire via Qualtrics software. Names and emails of the identified superintendents were accessed through the AskTED online directory of Texas schools (AskTED, 2021). Names and email addresses not listed were searched for through a Google search of the districts. Data collected were maintained in the Qualtrics account. The online questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale. The questions provided response frames to elicit responses from the superintendents that would describe

superintendents' perceptions of the demands, pressures, stresses, as they relate to the day-to-day operations and unanticipated challenges, and the impact on their overall health, as well as the coping mechanisms superintendents utilized. Participants were also prompted to answer basic questions about their demographics, requesting information such as age, gender, years of experience, level of education, etc. A follow-up email was sent approximately four weeks later, asking for participation and thanking those who have participated. A third, and final, email was sent four weeks after, before data collection efforts concluded.

Instrumentation

A self-reporting questionnaire consisting of the Wellness Self-Assessment, the Administrative Stress Index (ASI), the Coping Preference Scale (CPS), and the Demographic and Biographic Survey was utilized. A modified version of the Panorama's teacher wellbeing assessment (Panorama Education, n.d.), a commercial product widely used and deemed a sound basis for adaptation to the purposes of this study, was utilized. The Wellness Self-Assessment evaluated superintendents' self-reported physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and workplace or professional self-care. Gmelch and Swent (1982) developed the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) specifically to identify school administrators' stressors by adapting the Job-Related Strain Index. Allison (1997) developed a Coping Preference Scale (CPS) utilizing three scales selected as models. The fourth part of the instrument, the Demographic and Biographic questionnaire, modeled after the Simonson Stress Survey for Superintendents (Simonson, 2013), was designed to gather demographic and biographical information from the participating superintendents.

The ASI questionnaire was pilot-tested for validity and clarity with a group of 25 administrators (Gmelch & Swent, 1982). Afterward, it was revised and pilot-tested on a second group of 20 administrators. The ASI consisted of 35 items and utilized a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was categorized into five factors with seven items in each. The five factors are: (a) administrative constraints, (b) administrative responsibilities, (c) interpersonal relations, (d) intrapersonal conflict, and (e) role expectations.

This study did not analyze stress factors by varying administrative positions (since all of the participants were superintendents); therefore, an adjustment was made to some of the survey questions (e.g., changed, trying to resolve differences between/among staff members to trying to resolve differences among internal constituencies including board members, administrative leaders, and faculty). In addition, responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale in order to eliminate a neutral midpoint.

Allison (1997) developed a CPS utilizing three scales selected as models. The CPS was pilot-tested with a group of 52 assistant principals. Allison's CPS consisted of 26 items and utilized a six-point Likert scale. The coping scale was categorized according to a Principal Components Varimax Rotated Factor Analysis. The factor groupings consist of: (a) good physical health program, (b) withdrawal and recharging, (c) intellectual, social, and spiritual support, (d) positive attitude, (e) realistic perspective, (f) time management and organization, and (g) increased involvement. The participants of Allison's study were principals and not superintendents. Therefore, a modified version of the CPS was utilized. Some adjustments were made to a couple of the survey questions (e.g., changed talk to district administrators or other school principals to talk to

colleagues or other Superintendents). Responses were recorded on a four-point Likert scale to eliminate a neutral midpoint.

The Demographic and Biographic questionnaire gathered information from the participating superintendents (e.g., gender, age, marital status, total years in current position, and total years as a superintendent, race/ethnicity, highest degree earned, and job satisfaction, student enrollment, and student demographic data). The demographics and characteristics of the participants served to create an image of the rural Texas superintendents that responded. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via a link embedded in an email.

Data Analysis

Quantitative analyses traditionally use descriptive and inferential statistics, such as means, variances, and covariances. They are assessed using the null hypothesis significance testing (NHST), but according to Grice (2014), “The observation-oriented scientist must furthermore steer away from the modern paradigm of statistical modeling” (p. 1). Grice’s analytic technique can also be used in descriptive studies, where the aim is to identify patterns that may contribute to the development of a model that can be tested in future research. This study applied both traditional statistical reasoning and Grice’s OOM concepts to produce a shift in perspective so that there was a focus on the individual while thinking causally and staying close to the observation, even if the study remained mostly descriptive rather than causal in focus.

The study began by running the iQ Stats analysis in Qualtrics (namely χ^2) and including effect size (Cramer’s V) and measures of statistically significant association. An alpha level of .05 was used for all traditional statistical tests. Then, the pairwise

rotation analysis tool in OOM was used to identify relationships between observations collected by way of the indices, and demographic data, since all of the research questions were centered on seeing whether there were any associations between different attributes, behaviors, and reported states of superintendents, thereby simplifying the data analytic process. The pairwise rotation, “similar to building a correlation matrix for multiple variables in the Pearsonian-Fisherian tradition” (Grice, 2016, p. 48), has the advantage of allowing for evaluation of individual items and search for signs of a close relationship between that item and other objects, subscales, or demographic variables.

The OOM software calculates a percent correct classification (PCC) index (a statistic based on the percent of individuals following an observed or predicted pattern of observation), as well as a probability statistic known as the *c*-value or chance value (Grice 2014, 2015). Additional tests were performed in the Build/Test model feature for significant results, and the resulting multi-unit frequency histograms were inspected for additional patterns. Finally, additional tests using conventional statistics for comparison were performed for any OOM identified associations that were strong.

Results

Results have been organized by research questions related to self-reported coping mechanisms, health, job satisfaction, demographic variables, wellness, and levels of stress. The findings are reported beginning with descriptive statistics, followed by the Chi-Square Tests of Association, including Cramer’s *V*, as calculated by Qualtrics. The OOM software calculated the Percent Correct Classification index, as well as a probability statistic known as the *c*-value or chance value.

Descriptive Statistics

Out of a possible 352 Texas rural superintendents initially contacted, 113 (32%) completed the Superintendent Self-Evaluation Survey. The data from the survey gathered participants' demographic information that included age, gender, race/ethnicity, level of education, and years of superintendency experience, and student enrollment.

Superintendents were also asked to self-evaluate their levels and source of stress, personal health and wellness, and coping mechanisms utilized. It was opted to have responses recorded on a four-point Likert-like scale in order to eliminate a neutral midpoint. The typical rural superintendent, who participated in this study, is a married, white male, between the ages of 46 and 65, with a master's degree and 17+ years of experience as an educator. Demographic data relating to the participant superintendents are located in Table 1.

Inferential Statistics and OOM Analyses

Research Question 1 focused on the association between superintendents' self-reported coping mechanisms and self-reported health conditions. Participants reported being in good (64.3%) to excellent (15.2%) health; few who reported having experienced a major medical illness (15%) as a result of job stress. Using the iQ Stats analysis in Qualtrics, a chi-square test of association was performed. As would be expected, there was a statistically significant relationship between maintaining good health habits (weight control, healthy food, reduce caffeine, etc.) and reports of overall general health, $\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 59.3, p < .001, V = .42$; OOM analysis did not identify a pattern of association (PCC = 32.14, *c*-value .30). The coping mechanism with no statistically significant relationship was to take mini-vacations (weekend away), $\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 4.22, p .90, V$

= .11. All superintendents reported talking to colleagues or other superintendents to some degree or another as a coping mechanism. According to the OOM analyses, there was no strong relationship between superintendents' self-reported coping mechanisms and self-reported health conditions: regular physical exercise (PCC = 49.11, *c*-value .03), compartmentalization of work and non-work life (PCC = 41.07, *c*-value = .14), and maintaining good health habits (PCC = 32.14, *c*-value = .30).

Table 1

Demographic Variables for All Participants

Variable	<i>n</i>	%	Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender			Number of Years as Educator		
Female	28	24.78%	17+ Years	100	88.50%
Male	85	75.22%	13-16 Years	9	7.96%
			8-12 Years	4	3.54%
Race/Ethnicity			3-7 Years	0	
White/Not Hispanic	107	94.69%	1-3 Years	0	
Hispanic/Latino	5	4.42%			
Native American or Pacific Islander	1	0.88%	Years of Superintendency Experience		
Age Group			17+ Years	10	8.85%
>65	7	6.19%	13-16 Years	15	13.27%
56-65	41	36.28%	8-12 Years	25	21.12%
46-55	46	40.71%	3-7 Years	38	33.63%
35-45	18	15.93%	1-3 Years	25	21.12%
<35	1	0.88%			
Marital Status			Highest Degree Earned		
Single	1	0.88%	Master's	90	79.65%
Married	105	92.92%	Doctorate	23	20.35%
Divorced/Separated	6	5.31%	Student Enrollment		
Widowed	1	0.88%	<200 students	49	43.36%
Other	0		200-300 students	26	23.01%
			≤600 students	38	33.63%

Research Question 2 concentrated on the association between superintendents' self-reported coping mechanisms and reported job satisfaction. A large portion of rural Texas superintendents identified as being quite satisfied (58.4%) and extremely satisfied (23.9%), with their job, with very few who reported their job satisfaction as not at all satisfied (1.8%) or slightly (15.19%) satisfied. It was found that superintendents were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs if they withdraw physically, such as leaving the office or school for a time, $\chi^2 (9, N = 113) = 27.5, p .001, V = .29$. Using OOM's analysis, those who said that they were quite satisfied or extremely satisfied showed a very modest tendency to report that they sometimes or almost always engaged in less active non-work or play (PCC = 52.21, *c*-value = .06), as did those who approached problems optimistically and objectively (PCC = 52.21, *c*-value = .01), a pattern not likely due to chance. About 1 in 2 superintendents who reported being satisfied, also reported frequent engagement in these activities, which is not an impressive result.

Research Question 3 investigated the association between superintendents' level of education, years of experience, and gender and their reported coping mechanisms, health, and wellness (physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, and workplace or professional self-care). A large portion of rural Texas superintendents reported having earned their master's degree (79.6%), with only about 1 in five having earned their doctorate (20.4%).

There is a significant association between the level of education and setting realistic goals, $\chi^2 (3, N = 113) = 15, p .0018, V = .36$, and maintaining good health habits, $\chi^2 (3, N = 113) = 10.8, p .0129, V = .31$ and only a moderate association with engaging in less active non-work or play, $\chi^2 (2, N = 113) = 7.09, p .0289, V = .25$. Superintendents

with a doctorate attested to be in excellent (5.4%), good (6.3%), and fair (8%) health, while those who reported their highest level of education as a master's degree profess to be in excellent (9.8%), good (58%), fair (10.7%), and even poor (1.8%) health.

There was a significant relationship between the two variables in the area of wellness. Superintendents with a doctorate were more likely than those with a master's to practice the art of receiving from others, $\chi^2 (3, N = 112) = 16.8, p .0008, V = .39$; OOM analysis also identified this relationship, $PCC = 67.86, c\text{-value} = .14$. In addition, OOM detected a strong pattern of association between levels of education and overall wellness in psychological self-care, such as making time for self-reflection ($PCC = 76.58, c\text{-value} .02$), and emotional self-care, for instance, spending time with others whose company they enjoy ($PCC 79.46, c\text{-value} = .02$). In other words, about 7 in 10 superintendents who reported having a doctorate, also reported frequent engagement in these activities, which is an impressive result. However, these relationships were not detected by traditional statistics.

The years of superintendency experience ranged from one year to 17+ years, with most (55.7%) having served less than seven years. Participants also reported the number of years served in their current position. The majority (44.2%) had served their current district five years or less, with the fewest respondents having served 17+ years (8.8%) as superintendents. There was a moderate association between the years of superintendency experience and regular physical exercise $\chi^2 (12, N = 113) = 24.6, p .0167, V = .27$; however, OOM did not detect an observable pattern. A significant association was found between years of superintendency experience and overall general health $\chi^2 (12, N = 112) = 2.7, p .012, V = .28$; OOM analysis suggested no pattern between the two variables

(PCC 34.82, c -value = .10). The findings for an association between years of superintendency experience and overall wellness were non-significant by either analytical technique.

The pool of 113 respondents indicated that the typical rural Texas superintendent is male (75.2%) versus female (24.8%). The majority of female rural Texas superintendents identified as being in good (71.4%) to excellent (21.4%) health, with fewer who reported being in fair or poor (3.6%) health. Male superintendents reported being in good (61.9%) to excellent (13.1%) health and fair (23.8%) to poor (1.2%) health. No significant association was found between gender and overall general health, χ^2 (3, N = 112) = 6.51, p .09, V = .24. Moreover, OOM analysis suggested no significant pattern of association between those variables (PCC = 41.96, c -value = .82).

A modest association was found between gender and coping mechanisms. Female superintendents were more likely to utilize professional development to improve management and communication compared to their male counterparts, χ^2 (3, N = 113) = 10.6, p .014, V = .31; OOM analysis suggested this relationship is particularly strong (PCC = 71.68, c -value = .05). While chi-square tests showed no significant results, OOM analyses suggested a notable association between females and socializing (PCC = 70.80, c -value = .04), maintaining good health habits (PCC = 70.80, c -value = .04), approaching problems optimistically (PCC = 63.72, c -value .24), and partaking in regular physical exercise (PCC = 61.06, c -value = .32). Male superintendents indicated they would be more likely than females to withdraw physically, such as leave the office or school for a time (PCC = 68.14, c -value = .10).

The analysis for an association between gender and specific themes of wellness found females reporting that they frequently (50%) arrange their workspace, so it is comfortable, $\chi^2 (3, N = 113) = 8.93, p .03, V = .28$, whereas males reported to doing so never (4.7%), rarely (18.8%), and occasionally (54.1%). This finding was echoed by OOM analyses (PCC of 70.03 and a *c*-value of .03). Additionally, the OOM analysis detected an observable association between gender and wellness in the overall area of psychological and emotional self-care (PCC 66.07, *c*-value = .10).

Finally, Research Question 4 examined the association between superintendents' reported job satisfaction and self-reported stress levels. All participants reported some level of stress while serving as a superintendent, with very few being either extremely (12.5%) or never (5.4%) stressed, with the majority being moderately (52.7%) to considerably (29.5%) stressed. Significant associations were found between superintendents' reported stress and several work-related situations, including: not having the autonomy to carry out the job ($\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 56.9, p < .001, V = .41$), not knowing how individual board members will evaluate their performance, ($\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 49.2, p < .001, V = .38$), trying to influence board members actions and decisions that affect their district or the superintendent ($\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 47.2, p < .001, V = .38$), trying to resolve differences among internal constituents including board members, administrative leaders, and faculty ($\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 37.5, p .00002, V = .33$), imposing excessively high expectations on self ($\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 32.8, p .0001, V = .31$), and having to make decisions that affect the lives of individual people that they know, such as colleagues, staff members, students, etc. ($\chi^2 (9, N = 112) = 31.6, p .0002, V = .31$). Interestingly, however, OOM analyses did not detect any strong patterns of association between the

variables noted above. On the other hand, when all 24 individual sources of stress were totaled, both pattern analysis and crossed ordering tests in OOM indicated a strong directional relationship between the self-reported job satisfaction and total stress level ($PCC = 80.19$, $c\text{-value} < .0001$).

Discussion

Summary

This study focused on the complex demands, pressures, accountabilities, and expectations of rural superintendents. These challenges and other rural leadership responsibilities emerged as stressors, impacting health and wellness and overall job satisfaction and performance effectiveness. Numerous studies concerning rural superintendents of small school districts suggest the need for further studies in the areas of rural educational leadership (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Canales et al., 2008; 2010; Hyle et al., 2010), identifying occupational stressors and effective coping mechanisms (Boyland, 2010; Klatt, 2014), providing specialized training and support (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Lamkin, 2006; Litchka et al., 2009), and offering wellness programs (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019).

The problem defined in this study was that stress is anticipated to detract from job satisfaction and the effectiveness of the school superintendents (small, rural school superintendents in particular), but it is not known how stressed they are nor how well they cope with stress to moderate the effects on health and wellness. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to (a) identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents in Texas, which emerged as stressors; (b) investigate personal health and wellness; and (c) identify tools, skills, and coping

mechanisms that correlate with job satisfaction, and demographic and biographic variables. The information was gathered through a self-reporting designed questionnaire administered electronically via a link embedded in an email, which presented responses recorded on a four-point Likert scale to eliminate a neutral midpoint.

Conclusion

While standards for superintendency certification in the state of Texas consist of superintendents understanding values and having the ability to “maintain personal, physical, and emotional wellness” (19 Tex. Adm. Code § 242.15e), this standard had minimal research. Findings of this study reveal that the majority of participants reported being in good to excellent health, with very few who reported having a major medical illness (15%) based on job stress. Those results were in direct contrast to Robinson and Shakeshaft’s (2016) national study that found a moderate relationship between medical conditions and levels of stress reported by superintendents. As would be expected, there was a significant relationship between those who maintain good health habits and good health in general. A large portion of the respondents identified with being satisfied with their job. Additionally, modest statistically significant relationships were found between the superintendents’ reported job satisfaction and withdrawing physically, maintaining regular sleep habits, engaging in less active non-work or play, establishing office procedures, approaching problems optimistically, breaking away from daily routine, working harder, and setting realistic goals.

There was no significant association between the level of education and the years of superintendency experience and coping mechanisms utilized. There was only a modest association between gender and coping mechanisms. Findings for an association between

level of education and gender with overall general health were not significant. However, the association between years of superintendency experience and health was found to be significant. Reports of an association between the years of superintendency experience and wellness found no significant association, which contradicts Beisser et al.'s (2014) findings of a more significant gap among younger aged and earlier career years, where administrators were less able to accomplish a healthy work-life balance.

Interestingly, superintendents with a doctorate reported being more likely than those with a master's to practice the art of receiving from others. Furthermore, an observable association was found between gender and wellness in overall psychological and emotional self-care areas. However, according to the review of literature, superintendents who hold doctoral degrees, have higher levels of education, and have more years of experience were associated with less stress, pressures, and workload, frequent use of coping mechanisms, maintained good health habits, and have higher total leadership effectiveness (Allison, 1997; Boyland, 2011; Yates & De Jong, 2018).

The majority of the respondents reported being considerably stressed to moderately stressed. Although a few associations were found between superintendents' reported stress and several work-related situations, it appears that combined, the sources of stress have a strong directional relationship between the self-reported job satisfaction and total stress level of participating superintendents. Although logic would assume that reduced stress would correlate with improved job satisfaction, the analysis revealed the opposite. The statistics revealed that instead, job satisfaction reduces stress. Thus, indicating that job satisfaction is a driver of stress and should be increased to minimize pressures, demands, and challenges; therefore, decreasing stressors.

The review of the literature only yielded one empirical research study that investigated the correlation between stress and job satisfaction. Lefdal and De Jong (2019) used a survey that rated factors that most contributed to superintendent job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The top five factors that contributed to job satisfaction included an opportunity to impact students and build a team of educators, have substantial input into the district's direction and the ability to utilize their skills, and make a difference in teaching and learning. Some of the issues that contributed to having a negative effect on perceived job dissatisfaction included policy initiatives, property tax caps, state funding cuts, and changes to the teacher evaluation system. Therefore, future research should explore the theory that satisfaction moderates stress and perhaps the ability to handle it. Thus, possibly increasing longevity, performance, and effectiveness.

Strengths and Limitations

This study had several strengths. First, a link to a welcome video that included information about how the study would serve the professional community was embedded in the email inviting participants. Second, the four-part questionnaire provided a rich data set that presented insightful information. Third, both traditional statistical reasoning methods and Grice's (2014) Oriented Observation Modeling (OOM) were employed for a multi-dimensional examination of the data. Finally, it adds to the limited research on the health and wellness of rural Texas superintendents.

Despite the comprehensive data collected for this study, there are a few limitations. The data were gathered via a self-reporting designed questionnaire; it is assumed that respondents answered truthfully and thoughtfully and interpreted questions as intended. Data collection via questionnaire also presents limitations – interpretation of

questions, closed-type and forced-response eliminates respondents from providing potentially more robust data, and questionnaires can be inherently biased in their development. In addition, one of the questionnaires is not validated for research, which is a further limitation but its face validity for this study is notable. The final limitation is that this study proposed researching the detriments of stressors and not addressing the potential benefits of stress.

Implications

Limited research on the stressors and coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents is documented in the literature, but most significantly, on how rural superintendents maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness. This study, filling a gap in the literature, revealed that job satisfaction is a stress-reducer. While the common assumption is that less stress leads to higher job satisfaction when in fact, this study revealed the stressors are always there when superintendents are satisfied in their position. However, the stress is still present, even though it is not viewed as such.

Superintendents must be offered the opportunity to engage in problem-solving professional development, stress management training, and wellness programs and support systems (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Litchka et al., 2009). The importance of wellness must come to the forefront of the system's vision and purpose (Sackney et al., 2000). Practitioners, professional organizations, and universities can use the findings from this study to enhance preparation programs. In addition, organizations and state agencies should work together to offer greater awareness based on the findings from this study in their professional training programs to better equip superintendents to cope with stress and enhance their satisfaction when on the job (Canales et al., 2008; Lamkin, 2006,

Richardson, 1998). Finally, preparation programs could use the findings from this study, coupled with preexisting literature, to inform specialized training and support, practical application, and incorporate best practices leading to job satisfaction and stress reduction among rural school superintendents (Hyle et al., 2010).

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Personal, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Rural Superintendents

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Abstract

This case study is written for graduate students in an educational preparation superintendency certification course. It is a combination of real-life events experienced by small, rural school superintendents. The most significant differences between the rural superintendent and the urban superintendent are the transparency in the leadership and the visibility of the superintendent in the community. Additionally, the superintendents in this case study go through a myriad of on-the-job pressures. Their ultimate actions and reactions to the expectations, challenges, and stressors in rural superintendency play a role in their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, impacting their overall health and job performance.

Keywords: superintendents, rural schools, stress, health, coping mechanisms, case study

Personal, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Rural Superintendents

The role of a small, rural school superintendent often goes beyond that of executive, organizer, listener, communicator, and active community member (Copeland, 2013). Small, rural executive leaders regularly fulfill multiple administrative and non-administrative functions. Many of the roles of which they assume include, but are not limited to, learning facilitators, curriculum specialists, assessment coordinators, chief financial officers, transportation directors, cafeteria managers, plant and facilities managers, heads of security, marketing directors, and even substitute teachers with the list of non-administrative duties and responsibilities continuing to grow (Canales et al., 2010; Copeland, 2013; Hyle et al., 2010; Lamkin, 2006). Restricted budgets in small, rural schools force these top executive leaders to wear numerous hats to meet the job demands with many stressors and limited resources (Canales et al., 2010). Lamkin (2006) found that rural superintendents “used the same phrase to describe their work: jack of all trades” (p. 21).

Hyle et al. (2010) described the essence and demands of small school superintendency as being “the center of the wheel, and feeling solely responsible for the district can be overwhelming” (p. 165). High demands, stressors, and pressures of the superintendency necessitate superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, or risk health-related issues, possibly experience burnout, leave the district, and maybe even the profession of education (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Sogunro, 2012; Tekniepe, 2015). Many studies in the literature correlate the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of superintendents with job-related stress (Canales et al., 2010; Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006; Tekniepe, 2015). Other studies have addressed

ways superintendents have managed their overall personal, physical, and emotional wellness impacted by these stressors (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). The ultimate actions and reactions to the expectations, challenges, and stressors in rural superintendency play a role in their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, impacting their overall health.

Roles and Expectations

The expectations placed on small, rural school superintendents typically exceed those placed on urban school superintendents by stakeholders in their respective educational communities (Copeland, 2013; Hyle et al., 2010; Jones, 2012; Litchka et al., 2009). Through interviews with superintendents and board members on the topics of rural school superintendents' roles, the many hats they wear, and the expected differences between urban and rural school superintendents, Copeland (2013) found that of the school board members interviewed, "none expected a superintendent of a larger district to perform those tasks, but all expected their own superintendent to do so if needed" (p. 8). Whereas urban school superintendents enjoy the luxury of delegation, Copeland (2013) reported that small, rural school superintendents are expected to personally address many problems that may arise. Jones (2012) reiterated the role of superintendents as more essential and challenging to execute with the demanding increase of accountability and expectations. Perceived realities set expectations. Therefore, superintendents wear many hats; some are worn voluntarily while others are forced to be worn (Copeland, 2013).

Challenges

The pressures of the managerial responsibilities and the challenges of the added duties of a small, rural school superintendency can be exhausting. Many challenges that

affect rural leadership exist in rural schools that are not present in urban area schools, such as geographic isolation, cultural isolation, poor working conditions for teachers, lack of resources, and poor community involvement (Tekniepe, 2015), as well as high poverty levels, wide-ranging job responsibilities, and a significant public role (Forner et al., 2012). Furthermore, rural superintendents at times find themselves dealing with discipline issues and conflict management, serving as an instructional leader, assuming responsibility for board relations, and dealing with internal and external pressures, shared decision-making issues, financial stress, and critical aspects of district operations (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Tekniepe, 2015).

Lamkin (2006) examined multiple challenges faced by rural superintendents. He found rural superintendents served as sole administrators with a lack of training; and little privacy, “rural superintendents suffer a unique lack of privacy; they enjoy little private life and come under scrutiny for everything that they do at school and in other settings” (p. 17). Serving as a solo administrator or in a dual role of superintendent/principal “places a large amount of wear and tear on administrators” (Canales et al., 2010, p. 2). When dealing with parent or teacher concerns, a principal may find himself unsure of which direction to take or how to handle a sensitive matter that would require following a grievance protocol, as he serves as the superintendent, and there is no one else to go to for direction or guidance. It is challenging to balance a budget, adopt and implement policies, plan curriculum, and support students in extracurricular activities, while meeting the demands of board members, faculty and staff, developing relationships with parents, and becoming involved in the wider community.

Stressors

The definition of stress/job stress for this study was taken from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Prevention as defined by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). “Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (CDC, 2020). Nix and Bigham (2015), who conducted a phenomenological inquiry of the critical skills necessary for the interim superintendency, asserted, “the interim must understand the potential stresses involved” as the “position of superintendent is largely seen as equivalent to the things of a business with all the accompanying stressors and has the potential to exhaust the administrator” (p. 57). Canales et al. (2010) identified several job stressors inherent in the sole administrator’s roles, the lack of time to complete all daily tasks, constantly feeling rushed, and superintendents feeling they are not doing anything well. Superintendents reported stress from “being all things to all people at all times, having all responsibilities, not having a sounding board, and feeling that everything they do is not up to their expectations” (Canales et al., 2010, pp. 6-8). Consequently, superintendents become “the only go-to person” (p. 4) in the district, which adds to the stress of an already demanding job.

When asked what caused the most on-the-job stress, the superintendents’ average response was changes in federal and state policies, time demands, and a lack of school funding (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). Other reported stressors included the time required by the job, work-life balance (Mahfouz, 2018), being an outsider in a small rural community (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015), the use of social media for district

communication, and participating in after-hour activities at the expense of personal time (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016; Sogunro, 2012). Nonetheless, according to Glass and Franceschini (2007), the amount of stress that leaders face is increasing and can become “a disabling condition affecting behavior, judgment, and performance” (p.47).

Health and Wellness

The definitions of health and wellness for this study came from the World Health Organization (WHO; 2020) and the National Wellness Institute (NWI; 2020). The WHO defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2020). The NWI promotes the Six Dimensions of Wellness as emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual (NWI, 2020). Robinson and Shakeshaft (2016) conducted a national study addressing superintendents’ stress and well-being. Researchers compared levels of stress to levels of health, as superintendents reported that the most significant impact of stress was on their physical health, mental health, and spousal relationships. Superintendents identified health conditions, which included “high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, anxiety, sleep apnea, and chronic headaches” (p.130). One superintendent shared his experience as a newly appointed executive leader by saying, “I developed high blood pressure, gout, and diabetes over the first three years. I could not understand why anyone did this job” (p. 127). Another superintendent disclosed, “I have constant neck, jaw, and shoulder pain in addition to decreasing cardiovascular fitness due to no time for exercise. I also have no time for socializing or relaxing” (p. 127). When asked if they were concerned about developing

health conditions, the top three health issues reported were heart attack, anxiety, and heart disease.

Regarding the wellness of educational leaders, Perkins et al. (2009) suggested pressures from the profession necessitate leadership rooted in a spiritual core. Wheatley (2002, as cited in Perkins et al., 2009) determined, “These pressures require leadership anchored in a spiritual core that provides a sense of identity, convictions, principles, and steadfast leadership practices” (Purpose section, para 1). Overall, the study found a significant correlation between spirituality and good leadership practices. “The summation of spirituality is having an anchor that provides the courage to do that, which is right for others in a manner that is caring, just, equitable, and democratic” (Discussion section, para. 8). “McCurdy and Hymes (1992) proposed that the demands of the position may be such that many superintendents are worn down and leave their jobs under duress” (as cited in Tekniepe, 2015, p. 1), thus affirming the need to maintain overall health and wellness. Therefore, it is essential to understand the stress levels and health conditions along with the means superintendents use to bring about overall wellness and resilience.

Coping Mechanisms

The literature suggests that rural superintendents play a unique role in their profession and are impacted by on-the-job stressors, and therefore need to find methods of dealing with stress for their overall health and wellness. Sogunro (2012) contended that an “administrators’ lack of stress-coping techniques is akin to a soldier who knows how to fight but is not knowledgeable and skillful about how to defend himself or herself. Such a soldier may not return from the battlefield alive!” (p. 666). Therefore, superintendents should be able to identify the source of harmful stress in addition to

finding effective coping mechanisms for success (Litchka et al., 2009). Moreover, Tekniepe (2015) stated, “Superintendents should learn how to interpret and predict the political landscape---both internal and external and adjust accordingly” (p. 10).

Coping strategies and hobbies mentioned by Lefdal and De Jong (2019) included humor, daily to-do lists, quality time with family, relying on peers, socializing, and exercising. Superintendents also shared the following coping mechanisms and strategies for creating a positive work-to-life balance, “time with family and allowing time to getaway, connecting with peers in the same position and visiting about how they are handling the stress, and exercising” (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019, pp. 69-71). Jones (2012) found having a personal vision for education as a successful tool when transitioning into the role of a new superintendent in Texas.

Other tools, skills, and coping mechanisms noted included prioritizing, relationships and friendships outside of school, interacting with the students, building a relationship with board members/stakeholders, developing interpersonal skills, self-regulating by remembering their guiding vision, and setting realistic goals (Canales et al., 2010; Hyle et al., 2010; Sogunro, 2012; Tekniepe, 2015). Canales et al. (2010) had a final question in their study regarding the techniques or strategies they used in dealing with the stress administrators encountered. One stress coping strategy utilized by five of the ten superintendents/principals interviewed was their strong faith. Superintendents interviewed credited prayer, God, and faith as ultimate stress relievers. The level of stress lessens when coping behavior is effective (Hawk & Martin, 2011). The key, then, is to find the right balance, discover what works, and seek strategies and tools to cope with the demands and stressors (Mahfouz, 2018).

Conclusion

Today's superintendents deal with complex challenges, demands, pressures, accountabilities, and expectations. These challenges and other rural leadership demands lead to stressors, which impact health and wellness, as well as overall performance effectiveness. Poor choices in maintaining one's health among superintendents can lead to making poor decisions while providing leadership and managing the day-to-day operations of a school district. Consequently, it is essential to understand the stress levels and health conditions, as well as the means superintendents use to bring about overall wellness. "We must help those who are suffering, but we must do more by preventing distress where we can and building on positive, strength factors where possible" (Rossi et al., 2009, as cited by Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016, p. 130).

Case Narrative

The Regional Education Service Center (RESC) is located in the northern part of the state and services the public schools in the most rural areas. It consists of 38 school districts located in 11 counties with an enrollment of 42,000 students with 141 school campuses. The RESC delivers services to 3,449 professional educators, 179 administrators, and 38 superintendents. Three rural school districts situated within the boundaries of the RESC are Rascón Independent School District (RISD), Dasten Independent School District (DISD), and Ethan Independent School District (EISD). Each of these districts is located in the most rural areas of the service center, where the towns are isolated from urban areas, and the district serves as the largest employer of their community. Due to this fact, each of the superintendents, along with the mayor, bank president, and community physician, is an important figure in his/her town. An

image of the small, rural school superintendency helps understand the pressures, stresses, and demands related to the impact of a superintendent's overall health. Maintaining personal, physical, and emotional wellness, therefore, is crucial to promoting effective performance.

Living in a Fishbowl – Sink or Swim

Rascón ISD – Superintendent Alaniz

RISD is a district that serves 540 students on three campuses in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, of which 65% are Hispanic, 31% White, 4% diverse, and 58% economically disadvantaged. The district is located in a rural town with a population of 2,049, where 77% of the populace own a home with a median property value of \$99,600. Rascón has a rich history in agriculture; the community is close-knit, holds a countywide livestock show, and is highly invested in its small school district. While a no-nonsense, get the job done administrator, Dr. Elizabeth Alaniz, superintendent of RISD, has charismatically served the district as superintendent for the past three years.

Dr. Alaniz enjoyed her job with Rascón ISD. She went through the Rascón school district from kindergarten through high school graduation. Dr. Alaniz recently celebrated 24 years of employment with the district, where she worked her way up from serving as a teacher's aide, teacher, and principal. She is fluent in Spanish and well-liked by the community.

During her first year as superintendent, Dr. Alaniz had allowed herself to be overcome not just with the responsibilities of the job but also with the community expectations and the time demands. She would be the first to arrive at work at 6:30 a.m. and the last to leave the building, sometimes as late as 8:00 p.m. Her small community

kept a watchful eye to make sure she never missed a sporting event, and she attended all local civic and church community events. Elizabeth wanted to be a servant leader and make her community proud, but at what cost? Not only did this put a strain on her marriage, but it also affected her overall health.

As Elizabeth cheered on her district's high school basketball team at a bi-district championship game, she reflected back to her first year as superintendent when she attended this very game. She remembered she had argued with her husband, had had an intense confrontation with the board president regarding a conflict with a veteran teacher, and had been rushed to the emergency room with what she thought at the time had been a heart attack. Elizabeth took a deep breath and was thankful for the life changes she had made.

On that distressing day, shortly before the game, Elizabeth and her husband, Paul, had argued about her attendance at the game, as she would be missing his mother's 75th birthday celebration. He reminded Elizabeth that he had been juggling his job, taking care of their three sons and the responsibilities around the house, like cooking, cleaning, and shuttling the kids to their extracurriculars, as well as caring for his ailing mother, all without her help because of her job demands. Paul let her know he did not know how much more of this he could take. She argued that it was expected of her to support the school and community and that she could not be everything to everyone, but that in this case, she felt she had to prove herself to the district and the community. They agreed she would make an appearance at the game and meet the family later.

Elizabeth had just walked into the gym when she spotted Mr. Smith walking toward her. Board member Frank Smith's sixth-grade daughter and her friends had been

complaining about a highly regarded veteran and mentor teacher, Molly Weaks. Frank made it his mission to track down Elizabeth and make sure she knew Molly needed to be confronted with making a change or be dismissed. Elizabeth had just heard from the middle school principal about his concerns regarding Molly's resistance to technology but had no idea that matters had escalated so quickly. It was one of the "perks" of living and working in a fishbowl community. Molly had expressed excitement and feigned buy-in but would not implement the newly adopted technology enhancement standards and eventually reverted to worksheets and diagrams. At the same time the Chromebooks sat unused in their storage containers. Mr. Smith had threatened to take matters into his own hands.

As Frank walked away, Elizabeth began to see kaleidoscope-like stars in her vision. Then, she experienced shortness of breath and severe chest pains. Elizabeth doubled over, fell forward, and became unresponsive. The next thing she remembered, her primary physician was at the hospital when she came to letting her know she would need to make some healthy lifestyle changes. At the age of 48, Elizabeth had been diagnosed with high blood pressure. She had been referred to a cardiologist and a week later had a coronary angiogram to have a stent put in her heart artery to restore blood flow. Her hypertension and excess weight were the only risk factors for her heart disease at the time.

Elizabeth acknowledged she would not live long if she did not do something, so she began to exercise, had lost 50 pounds over the past two years, and no longer took high blood pressure medication. She realized work would never be done; it would always be there. Elizabeth had worked with the previous superintendent, checked on her and

offered his support. She found she had a strong mentor-mentee relationship with him and was comfortable seeking his advice and guidance for problems that arose. As a result, Elizabeth became intentional in finding a work-life balance and taking care of her personal health and well-being.

Being All Things to All People at All Times

Ethan ISD – Superintendent James

EISD is located in the southern part of the RESC. The district serves 248 students on three campuses in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, of which 89% are White, 6% Hispanic, and 11% economically disadvantaged. The district is located in a relatively small, rural farming community with a population of 323, where 83% of the populace own a home with a median property value of \$175,900. Ethan's demographics have not changed much since its establishment in 1905. Church and school activities, most specifically high school volleyball, bond the Ethan community together. An article, posted on the website of a popular American sports channel, documented the town and its volleyball team. Mr. Eli James, new to EISD, has served as superintendent for the past school year. He has an administrative team of one secondary and one elementary principal. Each of the three administrators has an administrative assistant.

Mr. Eli James, a young man in his early 30s, was full of excitement when he accepted the superintendency position for Ethan ISD. While he is new to the town of Ethan and relocated his family in order to gain experience, he is not new to education. He had past teacher and principal experience, but this was his first superintendent position.

As Eli walked into the administration building, shared with the high school, he encountered an upset parent. Mary Parker insisted on speaking with him, "My son failed

his biology test. He never fails a test, which tells me his teacher is not teaching. I want to speak with an administrator.” Superintendent James greeted Mary as he walked her toward his office, where he motioned for her to have a seat and then asked her, “Have you visited with his teacher?” “No, Ms. Gabriel is not only his biology teacher, but she is also his principal, and I want to visit with someone who can be objective. I want the online password so that I can look at the test.” Just then, his administrative assistant knocked on the door and handed him a note reminding him he had scheduled a meeting with a parent, Bob Campbell, who was waiting to visit with him. Superintendent James pulled out his notebook, jotted down Mrs. Parker’s concerns as he said, “Let me get this down on paper so that I can visit with Ms. Gabriel. One of us will be in touch with you before the end of the day.” Mary was not pleased with the response, but she accepted his compromise. She thanked Superintendent James for listening and said, “You will hear from me if I do not receive a phone call.”

Bob Campbell, a high school parent, was also the pastor of the local non-denominational church. Mr. Campbell was upset by the students’ use of social media in the high school’s yearbook class and wanted to see some changes. Bob had already criticized him for not attending church on Sundays, so Eli was not looking forward to this visit. As Superintendent James prepared his notes to visit with Bob, he noticed he had two messages, one from his elementary principal about some concerns regarding a parent requesting to shadow her daughter throughout the school day. The other message from the volleyball coach letting him know the bus broke down and they needed it repaired in time for the next out-of-town game.

Overwhelmed by what Eli felt were so many responsibilities, he was beginning to regret taking a superintendency in a rural community. He had experienced on-the-job pressures before, but he just couldn't believe he was solely responsible for any and all aspects of the district. At his previous district, he had an assistant principal. And, the superintendent had an assistant superintendent of plant and services and another assistant superintendent of student services. Eli felt he was spread too thin and didn't have the time needed to complete all of his obligations.

Aside from the pressures, he was also feeling the emotional and physical strain. Eli thought he couldn't do his best work, wasn't doing anything well, was not indeed a part of the community, and ultimately was letting people down. He was experiencing constant neck, jaw, and shoulder pain. Furthermore, he found he barely had time for his family and didn't have time to exercise or socialize.

Through the Years – I've Got This

Dasten ISD – Superintendent Roberts

DISD is the smallest of the three rural school districts. Dasten serves 153 students, on a single campus of three buildings, in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, of which 79% are White, 15% Hispanic, 6% diverse, and 64% economically disadvantaged. The district is located in a rural town with a population of 637, where 78% of the populace own a home with a median property value of \$32,700. Dasten boasts of its first homestead in 1885 and the discovery of oil pools in the 1920s, leading to the school district's establishment. The community is connected through traditional church events, county fairs, yard-of-the-month competitions, and supporting the high school's six-man football team. In his late sixties, Mr. Andrew Roberts, superintendent of EISD, has served

the district as superintendent for the past seventeen years with one principal for the entire district and a shared administrative assistant.

Mr. Andrew Roberts's day started at 6:30 a.m., but before setting foot in the elementary building, he received a phone call about a water leak on the second floor. His principal, Nancy Jones, was out on maternity leave. The district is too small for an assistant principal meant he had to deal with the matter. He had just reached the landing to join the janitor when the cafeteria manager, Patty Altman, ran up to him and let him know the sewer was backing up into the kitchen. He chuckled and said aloud, "Well, that's about par. I wonder what will be next." Not understanding why he was grinning and what he meant, Patty asked, "What is that supposed to mean?" "You know, they say things happen in threes. I am just ready for what's next!" Andrew had always served in rural community schools. He was accustomed to the expectations, challenges, and responsibilities. As he made a mental list of what task to attend to first, the electricity went out in the building. He literally laughed out loud and said to his cafeteria manager and janitor, "And that, ladies and gentlemen, is what's next. I told you things happen in threes!"

Through the years, Andrew focused on what worked for him to deal with the stressors of the job. He made sure to develop a personal vision and mission, which helped push him forward. That is not to say it has not been difficult or challenging, but rather an overall learning experience that did not come easily. Over time, he developed personal strategies to deal with the challenges he faced. He learned to begin each day with prayer, prioritize his marriage and family, develop time management, have friends outside of work, establish a good relationship with board members, and get away from it all.

Teaching Notes

This case study is written for graduate students in an educational preparation superintendency certification course. It presents the experiences of three rural superintendents and how they each react and/or respond to the expectations, challenges, and stressors of rural superintendency as well as the coping mechanisms utilized for maintaining personal, physical, emotional, and overall health and wellness, which impacts the effectiveness of their performance. Discussions about the responsibilities of a superintendency in a small, rural community, as in the case of Dr. Elizabeth Alaniz, the superintendent for Rascón ISD, who felt as if she was in a fishbowl and needed to go above and beyond in order not to sink, are essential for those in training. Lamkin (2006) found rural superintendents expressed anxiety over being too visible with little privacy and serving with a lack of training. Dr. Alaniz found herself in a dilemma, which affected her marriage and her health. Notably, the stress level was found to be even more significant for women working in small, rural school districts (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015), with substantial impacts on health and spousal relationships (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). Her predicament had to have also affected her overall performance. According to Sogunro (2011), high levels of stress affect work habits and productivity.

Moreover, rural superintendents reported stress from being a jack of all trades (Lamkin, 2006), the center of the wheel (Hyle et al., 2010), and all things to all people at all times (Canales et al., 2010, pp. 6-8). As in the case of Superintendent James, who felt pressed for time and was overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities. It is crucial for educators seeking a superintendency to know there are different expectations for rural and urban superintendents. Copeland (2013) found that small, rural school superintendents

were expected to personally address any problems that may arise, with school board members admitting the same would not be expected if their school districts were larger.

Finally, aspirant superintendents should know the literature suggests rural superintendents play a unique role in their profession and are impacted by on-the-job stressors. Therefore, they need to find methods of dealing with stress for their overall health and wellness. Hawk and Martin (2011) found effective coping strategies lessen stress. This is evident, as in the case of Mr. Andrew Roberts, who has learned through his years of experience to focus on what works for him to deal with the demands and stressors of the rural superintendency. Learning from rural superintendents' lived experiences would be beneficial for aspiring rural superintendents. Understanding the perceived stressors and coping mechanisms that impact wellness and effectiveness is critical for superintendency preparation.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the standards for superintendent certification in your state?
2. What responsibilities would you think a superintendent can delegate?
3. Speculate as to reasons why Dr. Alaniz felt she was in a fishbowl and compelled to swim rather than sink?
4. Difficulties arise for rural superintendents who become overwhelmed by multiple roles and responsibilities, just as Superintendent James did when he felt he was spread too thin. What two things are advised for superintendents impacted by on-the-job stressors?
5. How can superintendent demands, such as changes in federal and state policies, time demands, and a lack of school funding, become more challenging for rural superintendents?

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of taking a superintendency position in a rural community?
7. Mr. Andrew Roberts professed his experience through the years made a difference in how he handles job stress. What is one of the most beneficial functions as a superintendent that allowed him to push forward?
8. How might superintendents be supported in their overall wellness?

Classroom Activities

1. Day-to-day responsibilities of superintendents can be challenging. Take the time to create a Venn Diagram of the possible expectations placed on rural superintendents, urban superintendents, and both. Then, conduct a brief 700-word literature review of the issues surrounding these superintendent expectations and recreate the Venn Diagram with the new information discovered.
2. How do you process occupational stressors as a professional educator? Some mechanisms for coping with stress are articulated in earlier articles (Canales et al., 2010; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Tekniepe, 2015) and summarized in the “Teaching Notes” section. We encourage you to use the articles to deepen your own understanding of stressors and coping mechanisms in rural superintendencies. Would you use the mechanisms described in the articles, or do you have your own strategies for effectively coping with stress? Explain your answers.

3. Hyle et al. (2010) introduced superintendents self-regulating by remembering their guiding vision. What is your guiding vision? Explain your answer.

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Personal, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Rural Texas Superintendents

by

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Abstract

Purpose: The distinct purpose of this review is to identify and synthesize the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which in turn affects their decision-making and job performance. **Method:** To address this research focus, a systematic review was guided by an adopted conceptual framework and an adapted analytical rubric for conducting systematic research reviews, as Hallinger (2014) presented. Data analysis focused on the extraction of evidence gathered using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods methodologies. **Findings:** The literature review yielded 58 empirical research studies relevant to the research focus. The synthesis of these empirical studies revealed: (a) there appears to be a gap in the research literature on superintendents maintaining their personal health and wellness, (b) common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents have emerged as stressors, and (c) the spiritual dimension of servant leadership as a coping mechanism that impacts superintendent health and effectiveness has become an apparent theme. **Implications:** The results of this extensive review of 58 empirical studies reflect the lack of research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness. Superintendents should be offered wellness programs and support systems and the opportunity to engage in stress management training. The importance of wellness should be evident in the system's vision and purpose. The review concludes with a discussion of implications, limitations, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Keywords: leadership, rural superintendents, health, wellness, coping mechanisms, decision-making, small schools, rural schools

Personal, Physical, and Emotional Wellness of Rural Texas Superintendents

School superintendents go through a myriad of on-the-job demands and pressures. The ultimate actions and reactions to the expectations, challenges, and stressors in rural superintendency play a role in their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, impacting their overall health, decision-making, and job performance. The role of a small, rural school superintendent often goes beyond that of executive, manager, planner, organizer, listener, communicator, and active community member (Copeland, 2013). Small, rural executive leaders regularly fulfill multiple administrative and non-administrative functions. Many of the roles which they assume include, but are not limited to: learning facilitators, curriculum specialists, assessment coordinators, chief financial officers, transportation directors, cafeteria managers, plant and facilities managers, heads of security, marketing directors, and even substitute teachers with the list of non-administrative duties and responsibilities continuing to grow (Canales et al., 2010; Copeland, 2013; Hyle et al., 2010; Lamkin, 2006). Restricted budgets in small, rural schools force these top executive leaders to wear numerous hats to meet the job demands with many stressors and limited resources (Canales et al., 2010). Lamkin (2006) found that rural superintendents “used the same phrase to describe their work: jack of all trades” (p. 21).

Hyle et al. (2010) described the essence and demands of small school superintendency as being “the center of the wheel, and feeling solely responsible for the district” (p. 165). Many studies in the literature correlate the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of superintendents with job-related stress (Canales et al., 2008, 2010; Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006; Tekniepe, 2015). High demands, stressors, and

pressures of the superintendency necessitate superintendents maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, or risk health-related issues, possibly experience burnout, leave the district, and maybe even the profession of education (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Richards et al., 2016; Sogunro, 2012; Tekniepe, 2015). Other studies have addressed ways superintendents have managed their overall personal, physical, and emotional wellness impacted by these stressors (Bell, 2019; Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). This systematic review serves as the qualifying exam that investigates the selected problem of practice: to identify and synthesize the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which in turn affects their decision making and job performance.

Conceptual Framework

“The conceptual framework is a guide for research; it serves to situate the research questions and the methods for exploring them within the broader context of existing knowledge about a topic even as the researcher seeks to generate new knowledge about that topic” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016, p. 194). The conceptual framework for conducting this systematic literature review was influenced by Hallinger’s (2014) five guiding questions. Hallinger focused on research design and methodological issues for rigorous, systematic reviews of research. Based on his recommendations for the review of research, the first question Hallinger asked was, “What are the central topics of interest, guiding questions, and goals?” (p. 543). The study aims to conduct a systematic review of empirical research on coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain overall wellness for effective performance. The specific aims of this study are to explore

leadership, specifically executive leadership, and to examine rural superintendency research published in academic and scholarly journals between 1982 and 2019, (a) to identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents, which have emerged as stressors; (b) to investigate health ailments or conditions brought on by the stressors; and (c) to identify tools, skills, and coping mechanisms that correlate with leadership styles and ethical responsibilities to impact decision-making and job performance positively; and to offer possible recommendations for rural superintendency preparation programs and further studies of stress management and wellness in the rural superintendency.

Sources and Search Procedures

Sources and search procedures for this review were guided by Hallinger's (2014) conceptual framework for conducting systematic literature reviews. This study's goal is to conduct a systematic review of full-text versions of empirically, peer-reviewed research to identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents. Specifically, to conduct a comprehensive review that synthesizes the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which affects their decision-making and job performance. *Empirical* is defined as, "derived from or denoting experimentation or systematic observations as the basis for conclusion or determination, as opposed to speculative, theoretical, or exclusively reason-based approaches" (American Psychological Association, 2020, para. 1). Therefore, this extensive, methodological review of the literature included empirically reviewed studies that were quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and some systematic reviews.

Hallinger (2014) combined the second guiding question with the third asking, “What conceptual perspective guides the review’s selection, evaluation, and interpretation of the studies?” and “What are the sources and types of data employed in the review?” (p. 543). The distinct purpose of this study is: to conduct a comprehensive review of empirical research to explore leadership, specifically executive leadership with an emphasis on rural superintendency, to identify and synthesize the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which in turn affects their decision-making and job performance. Furthermore, this study aims to offer possible recommendations for rural superintendency preparation programs and further studies of stress management and wellness in the rural superintendency.

The concept map in Appendix A illustrates which variables were researched, how they are expected to relate to each other, and the emerging themes. As established by Ravitch and Riggan (2016),

Whether your work is qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, mapping relevant central concepts visually can help to refine your working understandings of the topics and contexts at play in your research by forcing you to represent relationships visually as well as in narrative form. (p. 211).

The model represented in Appendix A reflects variables, relationships, and correlations. The relationship of stressors (dependent variables) experienced by rural superintendents and the coping mechanisms (independent variables) utilized to contribute to their overall health and well-being (dependent variables) are depicted. When superintendents practice

resilience and work toward finding a balance, maintaining personal wellness should increase, potentially promoting effective decision-making and job performance.

The review process used was bounded by set criteria and not selective or exhaustive, which Hallinger (2014) described as “the reviewer either uses samples from a population of studies or delimits the review through the use of explicitly stated criteria” (p. 546). However, for the purposes of this review, there was minimal research on rural superintendents or even superintendents in general, maintaining their personal, physical, and emotional wellness. Therefore, the research focus was not value neutral; and was the conceptual framework for gathering research without the limitations of population or subject. The articles collected included principals, higher education, teachers, and even business leaders, rather than only superintendents. “Ribbins and Gunter (2002) found it is a fallacy to suggest that systematic reviews are value neutral” (as cited in Hallinger, 2014, p. 544).

A specific search in literature search engines (WTAMU Library, ERIC, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and others) was employed using Boolean logic, a search string of keywords based on the research focus: leadership, rural superintendents, health, wellness, coping mechanisms, decision-making, small schools, and rural schools. Keywords are detailed in Appendix B. Reference lists of numerous empirical articles and all located studies reviewed were also searched. An investigation of publications of studies from 1982 continued between conducting the search through the writing of the qualifying exam, to include newly published studies. Criteria for including articles in the review were that it had to be (a) peer-reviewed; (b) an empirical study (i.e., not an essay, book review, letter, literature review, editorial, opinion, or antidotal article); (c) published in

scholarly or academic journals; and include (a) an abstract; (b) a purpose statement or specific questions to be answered; (c) a review of the literature; (d) a research design; (e) results; (f) a discussion; and (g) a list of references. Since the research was comprised of empirical studies, some articles did not explicitly state the theoretical or conceptual framework, and some did not include an abstract. However, the clearly presented purpose or significance of the objective made a clear argument for the research. It should also be noted that since the literature reviews for this research focus were comprised of peer-reviewed, empirical studies with set criteria, the developed rubric for the evaluation of the key features of the studies was adapted from Hallinger's (2014) original rubric. Studies were omitted if they did not meet the set criteria or were review types, theoretical, or not empirical in nature, except for approved systematic reviews and minimal dissertations. Also included are a limited number of books, systematic reviews, journalistic articles, and a meta-analysis, all seen as authoritative and credible sources, most of which are referenced in the search and procedures section and the presentation of findings.

Data Extraction and Analysis

The fourth search parameter guiding question recommended by Hallinger (2014) is, "What is the nature of the data evaluation and analysis employed in the review?" (p. 543). The first stage of data extraction included an extensive review of the literature, including the source type, author name(s), article title, journal, year, type of article (i.e., empirical or systematic review), research questions or purpose, research paradigm/method (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), statistical tests, context (i.e., setting, participant sample, topics), and inclusion criteria of reviews of research as

synthesized in the presentation of findings. The empirical research collected is a database of ideas and not primary data that have been analyzed to address the research goal: (a) to identify common occupational demands and challenges experienced by rural superintendents, which have emerged as stressors; (b) to investigate health ailments or conditions brought on by the stressors; and (c) to identify tools, skills, and coping mechanisms that correlate with leadership styles and ethical responsibilities to impact decision-making and job performance positively.

“Systematic reviews outline and justify the analytic processes applied to the information obtained from or about the constituent studies” (Hallinger, 2014, p. 547). Thus, the second stage of evaluation and analysis included developing an adapted analytical rubric presented by Hallinger. The analytical rubric was comprised of three levels of criterion fulfillment were 0 = the criterion is not met, 1 = the criterion is partially met, and 2 = the criterion is met (see Appendix C). Finally, the analysis and synthesis of the extracted data described in the paradigm methodology section of each review, which included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method paradigm methodologies, were evaluated.

Quantitative methods are frequently used in experimental and descriptive research with numerical data including statistical modeling, correlations, and reliability coefficients. Babbie (2010) defined quantitative analysis as “the numerical representation and manipulation of observations for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomena that those observations reflect” (p. 422). Empirical articles employing quantitative methods were reviewed to explore the relationship between perceived stressors and coping mechanisms to rural superintendents’ wellness. Onwuegbuzie et al.

(2011) claimed the primary objective of quantitative research has been to generalize information that is more abstract and removed from research participants. However, Toomela (2011) asserted, “quantitative methodology, even though it does not allow understanding the reasons why certain events are (causally) related, is still useful for making generalizations about relationships between events” (p. 25).

“Qualitative approaches are used when you want to add richness or thick description to your findings” (Farber, 2006, p. 367). Understanding the perceived stressors and coping mechanisms that impact wellness and effectiveness is critical for superintendency preparation and provided district support. Additionally, learning from rural superintendents’ lived experiences would be beneficial for aspiring rural superintendents. Therefore, empirical articles employing qualitative methods were reviewed to identify emerging themes in occupational stressors, health conditions, and coping mechanisms that impact rural superintendents. Qualitative research is defined by Yilmaz (2013) as an “emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world” (p. 312).

A mixed-method (MM) design provides the opportunity to conduct a more thorough investigation providing participant enrichment through an increase in the target population, fidelity of instrumentation through administering a close-ended (online) survey, and conducting open-ended face-to-face interviews, treatment integrity, and enhancing data interpretation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006). According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2006), “A major advantage of mixed-method research is that it enables

researchers simultaneously to ask confirmatory and exploratory questions, and therefore verify and generate theory in the same study” (p. 20). A range of reviewed quantitative data gathered ranked information of relationships among variables; occupational stressors, types of coping mechanisms, and effectiveness of coping mechanisms. Additionally, in various studies, qualitative data served as complementarity follow-up, allowing for semi-structured interviews with first-hand narrative accounts of personal superintendents’ lived experiences, allowing for identifying emerging themes and providing further explanation or support for the findings from the analysis of quantitative data.

The systematic review method was developed initially for the medical field and has been expanded for use in other research disciplines, including education (Perry & Hammond, 2002). Although it was impractical to adopt a full systematic review approach, elements of this comprehensive, in-depth methodological process have been incorporated into the third stage of this literature review. Another aspect of data collection from the systematic review of the literature involves “the extraction and treatment of data from the studies selected for review” (Hallinger, 2014, p. 546). Hitt and Tucker (2016) modeled their research after the standards set by Hallinger’s systematic review and broke down the guiding questions into a table. “These standards, phrased as questions, intend to generate conceptual frameworks rooted in scientific reporting” (Hitt & Tucker, 2016, p. 560).

The objective of this Qualifying Exam was to address the goals and review the studies to identify and synthesize the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and

emotional wellness, which affects their decision-making and job performance. Therefore, in the fourth stage, each article's extracted data was analyzed and entered into a spreadsheet based on the set criteria. Key features were evaluated according to an adapted analytical rubric presented by Hallinger (2014). The analytical rubric was comprised of three levels of criterion fulfillment were 0 = the criterion is not met, 1 = the criterion is partially met, and 2 = the criterion is fully met (see Appendix D). Application of the rubric evaluation ratings was placed on an Excel spreadsheet. A perfect score for the empirical studies would be 14 points (e.g., 7 criteria x score of 2 on the rubric). It should be noted that a generous interpretation was adopted to allow the inclusion of those empirical studies that did not incorporate an abstract or an explicitly stated conceptual/theoretical framework, as this would further delimit the scope of the sources available for review. Therefore, the operational definition required for inclusion was at a minimum of 10 points.

Presentation of Findings

The final guiding question for this scientific review of research is, "What are the major results of the review?" (Hallinger, 2014, p. 543). The conceptual framework and concept map were used to organize the studies during the analytical phase of the review to investigate the selected problem of practice, to identify and synthesize the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which in turn affects their decision-making and job performance. The search yielded 122 publications. However, the final articles meeting the set criteria and selected for review totaled 58 peer-reviewed, empirical studies published in 32 scholarly or academic journals. A list of journals

included in the systematic review can be found in Appendix E. This review also has systematic reviews (n = 7), meta-analysis (n = 1), dissertation (n = 1), as well as journal articles (n = 13), and books (n= 8) all deemed as authoritative and credible sources.

Along with the evaluation rubric, a content analysis of the selected research articles was conducted using three different content lenses: method, focus group, and purpose, as indicated in Appendix F, an adapted version of Gumus et al.'s (2018) table. The number of articles listed for each content area is not consistent with the overall number because they are mentioned or included in several studies. This search was completed by reading abstracts and keywords and conducting an in-depth analysis for further information.

The most utilized methodology in this research review was qualitative, with 26 empirical studies. The articles also included 16 quantitative and 15 mixed methods, all empirical and peer-reviewed. The category of focus groups included participants, those perceived as leaders, and even those who had an impact or impacted the study. This review focused on rural superintendency (n = 27), followed by superintendency (n = 23), and servant leadership (n = 7). Leadership (n = 34) studies did not always identify a specific leader and mentioned leaders in general, as did the category of others (n = 23), which included school board members, central office, city manager, to business manager with the list being exhaustive. Also included in the focus group were principals (n = 17) and teachers (n = 6). Some empirical articles focused on more than one group, so they were included in two or more categories.

The empirical articles were also categorized according to purpose. This review concluded that complex factors in the superintendency led to stressors. The content

analysis revealed that 30 articles explored occupational stressors through intentional research questions and findings of the study. They also manifested indirectly through superintendents' responses, mentioned in the literature reviews presented in the publications, or even noted as implications and recommendations for future research. Four empirical articles were specific studies about stress in the rural superintendency, stress in leadership (n = 10), stress in superintendency (n = 7), stress in principalship (n = 7), and stress in teaching (n = 2). The stressors listed most by superintendents included changes in state and federal regulations, the time required on the job and evening activities, inadequate funding, school board micromanagement concerns, high self-expectations, lack of privacy, and lack of work-life balance.

This review consisted of eleven studies directly related to wellness in leadership, four of which dealt with superintendent well-being, and only one concerning rural superintendent wellness. This telling illustrates that there appears to be a gap in the research literature on superintendents maintaining their personal health and wellness. Major physical health issues included high blood pressure, high cholesterol, insomnia, obesity, chronic headaches, and even heart attack/disease. Most reported emotional and mental health conditions consisted of loss of focus, difficulty following through or making decisions, depression, anxiety, and burnout. Stressors that negatively affected superintendents' spiritual well-being included being robbed of relationships, joy, and even faith.

Twelve studies explored coping mechanisms and strategies for stress management and wellness in leadership. The majority of studies were coping strategies in the principalship (n = 5), followed by coping in leadership in general (n = 2), in the

superintendency (n = 2), in the dual role of superintendent/principal (n = 1), in others (n = 1), and finally rural superintendency (n = 1). The most commonly noted coping mechanism was strong spiritual faith, including prayer and engaging in activities that support spiritual growth. Other coping mechanisms frequently mentioned included effective problem-solving, physical exercise, and a sense of humor, personal activities and work-life balance, the delegation of tasks, seeking support and guidance through friends and mentors, and setting realistic goals. Interestingly, research suggests that superintendents who hold doctoral degrees, have more years of experience and job satisfaction were associated with (a) less stress, pressures, and workload, (b) frequent use of coping mechanisms, (c) maintaining good health habits, and (d) having higher total leadership effectiveness (Allison, 1997; Boyland, 2011; Reynolds & O'Dwyer, 2008; Yates & De Jong, 2018).

The literature reviewed here includes examples of research that discuss the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of superintendents contributing to job-related stressors. In addition, several studies examine how superintendents have tried to maintain their overall personal, physical, and emotional wellness impacted by these stressors (Bell, 2019; Hawk & Martin, 2011; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). The studies' sample size ranged from a qualitative study of a single rural superintendent who had been a part of his school district for almost 40 years to 1,865 superintendents across the United States who completed an online national survey for a quantitative study. A literature review of the research findings follows, and a summary of each of the empirical studies can be found in Appendix G.

Leadership

Despite the decades of attempting to explain leadership, researchers and leadership scholars differ on its definition and theoretical perspectives. Northouse (2019) noted, “After decades of dissonance, leadership scholars agree on one thing, they can’t come up with a common definition of leadership” (p.41). Over the century, the meaning of leadership has taken on many forms, countless characterizations, and numerous descriptions. Defining leadership is essential to society; as Northouse pointed out, “Leaders have an ethical responsibility to attend to the needs and concerns of the followers” (p. 44). This ethical responsibility resonates with the moral dilemma faced by administrators. Several leadership styles share some of the characteristics and behaviors of effective leadership. Based on identified components of leadership, Northouse used the following definition, “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 43). These centralized components are essential for defining leadership.

Leadership is an expanse of complex and multidimensional theories and philosophies (Avolio et al., 2009; Reynolds & O’Dwyer, 2008; Taylor et al., 2007). There is no standard, universally acceptable definition of leadership (Northouse, 2019). So long as scholars and philosophers attempt to interpret it, there will be varying views and ideologies. Leadership is in a constant state of becoming, shifting itself to be suitable to diverse influences, societal factors, and cultural dynamics (Avolio et al., 2009). The meaning of leadership has gone through many transformations, concepts, and principles, as has been historically evidenced. It will undoubtedly continue to be examined, measured, and explored for decades to come. Ultimately our perspectives, experiences,

and personal beliefs will unquestionably continue to impact our understanding of leadership qualities, traits, approaches, and characteristics.

Servant Leadership

The leadership characteristics of servant leadership and its spiritual dimension have been chosen as the theoretical lens to view a leader's impact on individual and organizational health. "Servant-leadership, first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, is a theoretical framework that advocates a leader's primary motivation and role as service to others" (Smith, 2005, p. 3). Several researchers have varying definitions of servant leadership. Williams and Hatch (2012) defined servant leadership as one whose character is moral and ethical, does not look at leadership as a form of status, but rather one in which one serves others for the betterment of the whole so that all aspire to serve. Greenleaf (2007) first coined the term and defined servant leadership, stating,

The servant-leader is servant first – It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.

That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such it will be a later choice to serve – after leadership is established. (p. 83)

Definitions of the theories, models, and dimensions of servant leadership are many. Servant leadership theory, models, and behaviors are used in organizational training, taught in universities and colleges, and are widely recognized. Greenleaf (2007) developed the concept of the servant as leader. After reading Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*, the idea came to him where the main character, Leo, proves to be a leader through his servanthood. When referring to Hesse's story, Greenleaf stated, "To me, this

story clearly says that the great leader is seen as servant first, and that simple fact is the key to his greatness” (p. 79).

According to van Dierendonck and Patterson (2015), servant leadership is a virtuous theory. It is something internal, almost spiritual, based on a leader’s character. Sendjaya et al. (2008) believe that spirituality is one of the many servant leadership dimensions. The characters, traits, virtues, and values of servant leadership are used interchangeably. Spears (2004) outlined Greenleaf’s characteristics that frame servant leadership practices as (a) listening – receptively listening to identify the will of the group and help clarify that will; (b) empathy – striving to accept and understand others, never rejecting them, but sometimes refusing to recognize their performance as good enough; (c) healing – recognizing potential for healing one’s self and others; (d) awareness – strengthened by general awareness and above all self-awareness, which enables them to view situations holistically; (e) persuasion – relying primarily on convincing rather than coercion to build consensus; (f) conceptualization – seeking to arouse and nurture theirs’ and others’ abilities to ‘dream great dreams’; (g) foresight – intuitively understanding the lessons from the past, the present realities, and the likely outcome of a decision for the future; (h) stewardship – committing first and foremost to serving the needs of others; (i) commitment to the growth of people – nurtures the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees; and (j) building community – working within their institutions, and giving the healing love essential for health. These characteristics provide an insight into the personality and behaviors of the servant leader. Through these characteristics, the servant leader will “create healthy organizations that nurture individual growth,

strengthen organizational performance, and, in the end, produce a positive impact on society” (Northouse, 2019, p. 230).

Spears (2004) acknowledged the characteristics as non-exhaustive, “But they serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge” (p. 10). Van Dierendonck (2011) outlined six critical characteristics of servant-leaders as those who “empower and develop people; they show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and are stewards who work for the good of the whole” (p. 1232). Additionally, Eva et al. (2019) concluded that servant leadership takes the whole person (e.g., relational, ethical, emotional, spiritual) into consideration to inspire them to grow. Furthermore, Johnson’s (2017) list of what researchers have found to be true about servant leaders includes an ethical and trusting climate created by servant leadership. Finally, Johnson (2017) pointed out,

Servant leadership is founded on altruism that is essential to ethical leadership.

You can serve only if you commit yourself to the principle that others should come first. You are far less likely to cast shadows if you approach your leadership roles with one goal in mind: the desire to serve. (p. 312)

This altruistic attitude, compassionate love, and concern for others in servant leadership are consistent with ethical leadership. Moreover, Sendjaya et al. (2008) found servant leadership to be an altruistic leadership style that embodies a spiritual nature. They argued that “spirituality is an important source of motivation for servant leaders” (p. 404). This holistic servant leadership model emphasized that spirituality and morality-ethics “are the *sin qua non* of servant leadership” (Sendjaya et al., 2008, p. 410). When in

a leadership position, it is critical to determine one's values, virtues, principles, and leadership styles that lend themselves to building resilience and leading with intention and purpose. Thus, cultivating the behaviors, tools, and skills needed to maintain one's personal, physical, and emotional wellness brings about the well-being of self, followers, and the organization.

Superintendency

As chief executive officer of schools, the superintendency is an essential leadership position (Boyland, 2011). Research points to this profession's vital roles and responsibilities that focus on doing what is best for children. Leadership qualities emphasized by Bredeson et al. (2011) included "generosity, honesty, forthrightness, caring, and creativity, but the real clues to their leadership were attached to the context of their daily work and their participation in these systems of meaning and practice" (p.17). The position of superintendent of schools "has the potential for such a big impact on a school district" (Nix & Bigham, 2015, p. 54). When asked what motivated them, superintendents reported the following in the top three: making a difference, providing leadership, and moving the district forward (Bell, 2019).

In early leadership literature, the effectiveness of superintendents was characterized as "strong and in charge; teachers, school board members, and community members rarely challenged their decisions" (Klatt, 2014, p. 456). However, over time, there has been an evolution in best practices (Bird et al., 2013), in expected shared decision-making (Tekniepe, 2015; Barley & Beesley, 2007), in serving as chief financial officer and instructional leader (Bigham & Nix, 2011; Jones, 2012), and in influencing vision as a visionary leader (Bigham & Nix, 2011; Taylor et al., 2007; Bredeson et al.,

2011; Bird et al., 2013). All of these practices play a vital role in public school superintendency. Moreover, characteristics of effective superintendents, as reported by Waters and Marzano's (2006) meta-analysis of research, includes: (a) collaborative goal-setting, (b) resulting in non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction, (c) with board aligned support, (d) that is continuously monitored, while (e) effectively utilizing resources. Furthermore, they suggest "that when district leaders are carrying out their leadership responsibilities effectively, student achievement across the district is positively affected" (p. 11). Furthermore, superintendent tenure was found to correlate with student achievement. Therefore, superintendent stability is considered a significant implication for board members who evaluate and hire.

In a study of principals' perceptions of the superintendency, Boyland (2013) surveyed 87 principals from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio. They found that most principals perceived the superintendency to be a highly stressful position, and at the same time, most rewarding. Additionally, most of them also agreed that they would consider the superintendency because of their strong desire to serve and make a positive difference for students despite the stressors expressed. "Throughout the United States, school district leaders continue to face new challenges such as changing demographics, high stakes testing, increased academic accountability, and constantly changing technology" (Hendricks, 2013, p. 62). Therefore, through their inherited opportunity and responsibility, school superintendents' success may be determined by their management abilities, willingness to seek input, and problem-solving and decision-making strategies (Bird et al., 2013).

Superintendency Standards

Superintendents in the state of Texas are required to complete an approved superintendent educator preparation program and meet state requirements set by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for superintendent certification (TEA, 2020a). Standards for Texas superintendent certification consist of eight learner-centered standards. The eight learner-centered standards include values and ethics of leadership, leadership and district culture, human resources leadership and management, policy and governance, communications and community relations, organizational leadership and management, planning and development, and instructional leadership and management. This review of literature will highlight the learner-centered standard for values and ethics of leadership, which states, “A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner. A superintendent understands, values, and is able to: (e) Maintain personal, physical, and emotional wellness” (19 Tex. Adm. Code § 242.15e). This standard has little research in the rural superintendency of the state of Texas.

Jones (2012) examined the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas. Findings revealed that the entry period to a new superintendency is critical, a plan is essential, preparation programs are necessary, as are opportunities for professional development. During the entry period, beneficial activities included analyzing a district’s budget and student achievement data, assistance from other colleagues, and working with stakeholders and leadership teams. Interestingly, the development of an entry plan did not include the superintendency standard related to maintaining personal wellness.

Rural Superintendency

In Texas, a rural school district is identified as a district whose enrollment lies between 300 and the state median with an enrollment growth rate of less than 20% over a 5-year period or an enrollment of less than 300 students (TEA, 2020e). TEA classifies districts into nine categories, and rural schools are further differentiated by proximity into the following categorizations rural distant, rural fringe, and rural remote (TEA, 2020b, c). More than 20 percent of campuses in Texas are located in rural areas. In addition, Texas has 20 regional Education Service Centers (ESC) that assist the local school communities by providing services to achieve TEA expectations (TEA, 2020d). Forty of the sixty-two school districts in the Texas Panhandle supported by the Region 16 Education Service Center (ESC16) are considered rural remote or rural distant (ESC16, 2020; TEA, 2020c).

Rural schools are unique in that not only are they the heart of the community, but they are also usually the largest employer. Tekniepe (2015) noted the essential role played by rural school districts in a community. “Beyond providing students with the basic education and training that are important for securing an economic livelihood, rural school districts also provide economic support and serve as a cultural center in the community” (p. 1). Lamkin (2006) found personal visibility, relationships in rural communities, and community involvement significant in the rural superintendency. Additionally, Budge (2006) shared rural leaders’ belief of the need to understand the mindset of community members’ expectations of superintendents’ “willingness to be highly visible, accessible, and approachable” (p. 7). Furthermore, Barley and Beesley (2007) concluded that without a school, there would not be a community as the school is “the heartbeat of this community” (p. 8).

In today's schools, the superintendent is the educational leader and the one accountable for the success of all aspects of the school district. However, there are differences in the expectations of superintendents serving in small, rural communities from those serving in urban and suburban areas (Copeland, 2013). Grissom and Anderson (2012) reiterated the role of superintendent as chief executive and found urban districts have more success hiring experienced superintendents than rural. One of the distinctions included administrative assistance levels with no options for delegation or separation from daily concerns (Lamkin, 2006). "The biggest differences between the rural superintendent and the urban superintendent is the transparency in the leadership and the visibility of the superintendent in the community" (Jenkins, 2007, p. 3). These expectancies bring about unique added stressors, impacting superintendents' health and well-being, and overall performance effectiveness (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016).

There are many challenges specific to rural school leadership, such as isolation, poor teacher attrition, lack of resources, high poverty, role ambiguity, role expectations, and role overload (Canales et al., 2008; Jones, 2012; Lamkin, 2006; Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Litchka et al., 2009). Allred et al. (2017) contended that attention should be paid to challenges faced by female superintendents, as women serve rural districts in higher proportions in the superintendency. Each of the superintendent respondents in the study mentioned rural superintendency as a concern. One superintendent went so far as to express that "rural superintendency should be a prerequisite for any superintendent" (Allred et al., 2017, p. 9). Schools located in extremely rural and isolated areas tend to encounter specific difficulties (Isernhagen & Bulkin, 2013). Through interviews with

superintendents and board members on the topics of rural school superintendents' roles, the many hats they wear, and the expected differences between urban and rural school superintendents, Copeland (2013) was "surprised that all of those interviewed readily admitted that they believed their communities had different expectations of their superintendents than did urban and suburban districts" (p. 12).

Roles and Expectations. The role of a small, rural school superintendent often goes beyond that of executive, organizer, listener, communicator, and active community member (Copeland, 2013). These small, rural executive leaders regularly fulfill multiple administrative and non-administrative functions. Many of the roles which they assume include, but are not limited to: learning facilitators, curriculum specialists, assessment coordinators, chief financial officers, transportation directors, cafeteria managers, plant and facilities managers, heads of security, marketing directors, and even substitute teachers with the list of non-administrative duties and responsibilities continuing to grow (Canales et al., 2010; Copeland, 2013; Hyle et al., 2010; Lamkin, 2006). Restricted budgets in rural schools force these top executive leaders to wear numerous hats to meet the job demands with many stressors and limited resources (Canales et al., 2010).

Rural superintendents described their work as being a jack-of-all-trades (Lamkin, 2006), being the center of the wheel (Hyle et al., 2010), and the go-to person for everything in the district (Canales et al., 2008). Superintendents even shared "how one minute they were on the phone with the Texas Education Agency dealing with a funding issue and the next minute they were dealing with a plumbing problem in the boys' restroom" (Canales et al., 2010, p. 4). Superintendents' roles and role confusion deal with their role as leader and their role as manager (Lamkin, 2006), the role played in

developing a positive school climate for student success (Mahfouz, 2018), and even the dual role of superintendent and principal and role assumption (Canales et al., 2008).

Other complexities deal with board relations, conflict, and power struggles.

“As the role and expectations of the superintendency change, the pressures also tend to change and become more complex” (Hendricks, 2013, p. 63). The expectations placed on small, rural school superintendents typically exceed those placed on urban school superintendents by stakeholders in their respective educational communities (Copeland, 2013; Jones, 2012; Litchka et al., 2009). Through interviews with superintendents and board members on the topics of rural school superintendents’ roles, the many hats they wear, and the expected differences between urban and rural school superintendents, Copeland (2013) found that of the school board members interviewed, “none expected a superintendent of a larger district to perform those tasks, but all expected their own superintendent to do so if needed” (p. 8). Rural superintendents were expected to perform many additional duties, including cafeteria workers, substitute teachers, and janitors (Copeland, 2013). Isernhagen and Bulkin, 2013 contended, “Clear and defined roles for the superintendent and board of education are essential to the development of a strong working relationship” (p. 117).

Whereas urban school superintendents enjoy the luxury of delegation, Copeland (2013) reported that small, rural school superintendents are expected to personally address many problems that may arise. Pressures come from parents and community stakeholders and even from principals, teachers, and other personnel within the district. Garn (2003) found several similarities between a comparative study of national survey data and the Oklahoma data on rural superintendents' characteristics and problems.

Surprisingly, Garn determined that 10% of rural superintendents surveyed were teaching one or more classes in their district. Furthermore, 24% were serving in a dual superintendent/principal role. This did not coincide with their urban and suburban counterparts. Jones (2012) reiterated rural superintendents' role as more important and challenging to execute with the demanding increase of accountability and expectations. Jones claimed perceived realities set some expectations. Consequently, superintendents wear many hats; some are worn voluntarily while others are forced to be worn (Copeland, 2013).

Challenges. The pressures of the managerial responsibilities and the challenges of the added duties of a small, rural school superintendency can be exhausting. Many challenges that affect rural leadership and exist in rural schools are not present in urban area schools, such as geographic isolation, cultural isolation, poor working conditions for teachers (Budge, 2006), lack of resources, and increased accountability (Bell, 2019), and community issues (Garn, 2003), access to technology and transportation sparsity (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011), as well as high poverty levels, wide-ranging job responsibilities, and having a significant public role (Forner et al., 2012). Rural superintendents at times find themselves dealing with discipline issues and conflict management, serving as instructional leaders, assuming responsibility for board relations, and dealing with internal and external pressures, shared decision-making issues, financial stress, and key aspects of district operations (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Tekniepe, 2015). Researchers found the most significant challenges facing superintendents included difficulty obtaining highly qualified teachers, lack of funding, curriculum and instruction issues, followed by political and governance issues (Bredeson et al., 2011; Treviño et al.,

2008). Interestingly, the more tenured the superintendent and in the same district, the lower perceptions of challenges were than the less tenured the superintendent.

Serving as a solo administrator or in a dual role of superintendent/principal “places a large amount of wear and tear on administrators” (Canales et al., 2010, p. 2). When dealing with parent or teacher concerns, a principal may find himself unsure of which direction to take or how to handle a sensitive matter that would require following a grievance protocol, as he also serves as the superintendent, and there is no one else to go to for direction or guidance. Lamkin (2006) examined multiple challenges faced by rural superintendents. They found that rural superintendents served as sole administrators with a lack of training and little privacy, “rural superintendents suffer a unique lack of privacy; they enjoy little private life and come under scrutiny for everything that they do at school and in other settings” (p. 17).

It is challenging to balance a budget, adopt and implement policies, plan curriculum, and support students in extracurricular activities while meeting the demands of board members, faculty, and staff, developing relationships with parents, and becoming involved in the wider community. Budge (2006) studied the influence of rurality as problem, privilege, or possibility and found place as privilege was expressed through leaders’ attachment to and virtues of living a valued lifestyle due to scenic geographic location, community size, and sense of belonging and extended family. However, most leaders viewed student isolation, lack of experiences, fewer opportunities, and limited aspirations as problem versus possibility. Superintendents expressed that the expectation of “encouraging schools to nurture students” to move from rurality as problem to possibility “simply adds to the long ‘to do’ list currently demanded” (Budge,

2006, p. 9). Other challenging aspects of the superintendency include lack of family time, meeting budgetary constraints, and navigating politics (Yates & De Jong, 2018). These challenges and other rural leadership challenges lead to stressors, impacting health and wellness and overall performance effectiveness. All of these challenges require specialized training (Lamkin, 2006).

Stressors. In addition to rural superintendency challenges, detrimental stressors emerged as a theme found in the literature. The definition of stress/job stress for this study was taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as defined by The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). “Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (CDC, 2014, What is job stress? section, para. 1). Although stressors can be both beneficial and detrimental, this review focused on the adverse effects of negative stress (Hawk & Martin, 2011). Nix and Bigham (2015), who conducted a phenomenological inquiry of the critical skills necessary for the interim superintendency, asserted “the interim must understand the potential stresses involved” as the “position of superintendent is largely seen as equivalent to the CEO of a business with all the accompanying stressors and has the potential to exhaust the administrator” (p. 57).

An early review of perceived stressors’ impact on administrative health led Gmelch and Swent (1982) to specifically develop the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) for school administrators. Oregon School Administrators, consisting of 1,211 full-time administrators, completed the questionnaire, including 151 superintendents/superintendent-assistant principals. Administrative constraints, followed by

administrative responsibilities and interpersonal relations, were perceived as most stressful by participants as a whole. Careful attention was paid to the post hoc analysis of the superintendent subgroup. Superintendents perceived more stress from complying with rules and policies than the other subgroups, followed by gaining public approval. Wholly, “more than 60% reported that at least 70% of their total life stress resulted from their job” (p. 18).

In their quest to identify on-the-job stressors of administrators serving in dual roles of superintendent and principal in small, rural schools, Canales et al. (2010) identified several on the job stressors inherent of the sole administrator’s roles, the lack of time to complete all daily tasks, constantly feeling rushed, and superintendents feeling they are not doing anything well. In addition, superintendents reported stress from “being all things to all people at all times, having all responsibilities, not having a sounding board, and feeling that everything they do is not up to their expectations” (Canales et al., 2010, pp. 6-8). Consequently, superintendents become “the only go-to person” in the district, which adds to the stress of an already demanding job (p. 4).

Hyle et al. (2010) discovered that superintendents felt stressed about learning to manage their responsibilities and multiple roles in small schools and the added strain of dealing with federal policies/regulations and accountability. Other stressors reported include shortage of time, the constant feeling of being rushed, a never-ending task list, the feeling of doing nothing well, assuming all responsibilities, and not performing to stakeholders' expectations (Canales et al., 2010; Richardson, 1998). Also mentioned were dealing with legislative mandates and budget restraints (Hawk & Martin, 2011), resolving conflicts and making difficult decisions (Gmelch & Swent, 1982; Mahfouz, 2018), and

working with inadequate resources and staff limitations (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Lamkin, 2006) all lead to job-related stressors.

When asked what caused the most on-the-job stress, the superintendents' average response was changes in federal and state policies, time demands, and a lack of school funding (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). Two of those identified areas mirror those found by Hawk and Martin (2011). Other administrator reported stressors included the time required by the job and a work-life balance struggle (Mahfouz, 2018), being an outsider in a small rural community (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015), the use of social media for district communication, and participating in after-hour activities at the expense of personal time (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016; Sogunro, 2012). Rural administrators were found to have higher average stress levels than suburban and urban. However, Boyland's (2011) research on elementary principals' job stress contended that urban principals indicated the three demographic groups' highest mean. Nonetheless, according to Glass and Franceschini (2007), the amount of stress that leaders face is increasing and can become "a disabling condition affecting behavior, judgment, and performance" (p.47). Even though principals shared their zeal for their administrative roles, Beisser et al. (2014) noted an implied relationship between stress levels and lifestyle behaviors.

Richardson (1998) explored major sources of stress among 108 Connecticut superintendents using two separate survey instruments, the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) and the Superintendent Stress Inventory (SSI). The study found that major stressors significantly impact superintendents' personal and professional lives, producing feelings of anger, resentment, frustration, and anxiety. Furthermore, along with negative feelings experienced by the superintendents were the depressive feelings expressed that "paint a

rather bleak picture of the Connecticut superintendency in terms of stress management and its potential impact on their effectiveness” (p. 17). Jacobs (2019) studied perceived ineffective-leader-induced occupational stress that included nine diverse leaders from a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Special Agent, to a Licensed Practical Nurse, and various managers and executives, to a Firefighter. The study determined that “all of the participants identified work environments with ineffective leaders resulted in occupational stress which disrupted their health, well-being, and work-life balance” (p. 10).

Moreover, participants reported the unclear boundaries manifested through technology, which brought expected instant communication and greater work demands. Mohr and Wolfram (2010, as cited in Selart & Johansen, 2011) reported that stress and ethical dilemmas tend to coexist in organizations as stressful situations are likely to present leaders with ethical dilemmas. Klatt (2014) mentioned, “Studies report that current superintendents experience higher levels of stress than their predecessors did” (p. 478). Many studies in the literature correlate the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of superintendents with job-related stress (Canales et al., 2013; Copeland, 2013; Lamkin, 2006; Tekniepe, 2015).

Lefdal and De Jong (2019) used a survey that rated factors of perceived superintendent stress, family stress, health-related illnesses, coping methods for reducing stress, and superintendent hobbies. One-hundred and two superintendents out of 244 across a rural state in the Midwest responded to the survey. Factors superintendents perceived as most stressful included high self-expectations, evening activities, increased paperwork and reporting, collective bargaining, role ambiguity, and constraints of board

policy. Additionally, Lefdal and De Jong (2019) found, “School superintendents in districts with fewer than 500 students felt more stress than districts with more than 1,000 students” (p. 63). Because of the high demands, stressors, and pressures of the position, superintendents who do not maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness have a higher risk for health-related issues, experience burnout, and eventually leave the district and even the profession of education (Grissom & Andersen, 2012; Richards et al., 2016; Tekniepe, 2015).

High levels of stress were found to pose serious mental and physical health consequences (Boyland, 2011), affect work habits and productivity (Sogunro, 2011), heighten frustration and anxiety (Beisser et al., 2014), and permeate one’s personal, home, and spiritual life (Klatt, 2014). Gmelch and Swent (1982) contended that “an increase in stress was associated with poor self-reported physical health” (p. 26). Other studies have addressed ways superintendents have managed their overall personal, physical, and emotional wellness impacted by these stressors (Bell, 2019; Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). The key is to find the right balance, discover what works, and seek strategies, skills, and tools to cope with the demands and stressors (Mahfouz, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to study rural superintendency stressors and coping mechanisms that impact wellness and effectiveness. Stress in the superintendency clearly emerged as a theme from the literature review. Maintaining their well-being, therefore, is crucial to promoting effective performance.

Health and Wellness. Researchers compared levels of stress to health levels, as superintendents reported that the most significant impact of stress was on their physical health, mental health, and spousal relationships (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019; Robinson &

Shakeshaft, 2015; Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016). This study's definition of health and wellness came from the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) and the National Wellness Institute (NWI, 2020). The WHO defines *health* as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 2020, What is the WHO definition of health? Section, para. 1). The NWI promotes Six Dimensions of wellness as emotional, occupational, physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual (NWI, 2020). Sackney et al. (2000) contended that total health and well-being are contingent on a balance of all six dimensions of wellness. In their assessment of the wellness of administrators, classroom teachers, and support staff, Sackney et al. reported that all groups rated the social and spiritual dimensions of wellness most highly, with the physical dimension as the lowest. Spiritual and social dimensions seemed to emphasize personal and professional relationships in the workplace.

Crippen and Wallin (2008) used the critical lens of servant-leadership characteristics to analyze the gathered data of nine superintendents. The fact that healing was not mentioned as a mentor characteristic but was mentioned as a personal leadership characteristic "may be evidenced in the high percentages of stewardship mentioned, whereby people serve in often self-sacrificing ways for the well-being of others, possibly at the expense of their own wellness" (p. 562). It was suggested that healing for others and the organization might be provided through stewardship, "but it may be that more needs to occur in the area of self-healing for superintendents whose work environments are often stressful and over-busy" (p. 562).

Williams et al. (2019) examined the perceived barriers, challenges, and opportunities experienced by ten rural superintendents in Idaho. One of the most significant factors identified as impacting their decision to stay or leave a school district included work-life balance. Examples of work-life balance shared by superintendents included being in a public role in a rural community and its impact on their families. One superintendent offered this advice, “A person should do some soul searching before accepting a superintendent situation. You and your family have to be okay with living in the fish bowl” (Williams et al., 2019, p. 10). Others shared how frequently a superintendent “sacrifices their own family for other people’s families and that a board that supports a superintendent’s home life is a positive for superintendent health” (p. 11). Klocko et al. (2019) reported that leadership tenacity is determined by resilience, grit, and superintendents’ experiences. Superintendents shared, “They are strategic and understand that to maintain strength they must make a conscious effort to seek a healthy balance in their life and to reserve time for rest and renewal” (p. 6).

A national study addressing superintendents’ stress and well-being was conducted by Robinson and Shakeshaft (2016). Superintendents identified health conditions, which included “high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, anxiety, sleep apnea, and chronic headaches” (p.130). One superintendent shared his experience as a newly appointed executive leader by saying, “I developed high blood pressure, gout, and diabetes over the first three years. I could not understand why anyone did this job” (p. 127). This superintendent reported he had developed the external skills and the internal capabilities needed to get through the demands of the superintendency and its responsibilities, which brought about better health. Another

superintendent disclosed, “I have constant neck, jaw, and shoulder pain in addition to decreasing cardiovascular fitness due to no time for exercise. I also have no time for socializing or relaxing” (p. 127). When asked if they were concerned about developing health conditions, the top three health issues reported were heart attack (21%), anxiety (20.9%), and heart disease (20.6%).

Regarding the wellness of educational leaders, Perkins et al. (2009) suggested pressures from the profession necessitate leadership rooted in a spiritual core. Wheatley (2002, as cited in Perkins et al., 2009) determined, “These pressures require leadership anchored in a spiritual core that provides a sense of identity, convictions, principles, and steadfast leadership practices” (Purpose section, para 1). Researchers surveyed 71 Texas principals to determine if spirituality correlated with sound leadership practices. Overall, the study found a significant correlation between spirituality and good leadership practices. “McCurdy and Hymes (1992) proposed that the demands of the position may be such that many superintendents are worn down and leave their jobs under duress,” thus affirming the need to maintain overall health and wellness (as cited in Tekniepe, 2015, p. 1). Beisser et al. (2014) contended that even though principals shared their passion for their administrative roles, their comments suggested there was a gap between knowing what to do about health and wellness and actually doing it. “Ultimately, the students served by educators should be the beneficiaries of a better understanding of educator wellness” (Sackney et al., 2000, p. 54). Therefore, it is essential to understand the stress levels and health conditions as well as the means superintendents use to bring about overall wellness and resilience.

Coping Mechanisms. The literature suggests that rural superintendents play a unique role in their profession and are impacted by on-the-job stressors, and therefore need to find methods of dealing with stress for their overall health and wellness. Sogunro (2012) contended that an “administrators’ lack of stress-coping techniques is akin to a soldier who knows how to fight but is not knowledgeable and skillful about how to defend himself or herself. Such a soldier may not return from the battlefield alive!” (p. 666). Klocko et al. (2019) conducted a two-phase study; the first phase found superintendents rarely expressed their feelings of anxiety or took the time to engage in stress-reducing activities. However, in their follow-up study of 10 rural superintendents from Michigan, Klocko et al. reported that leadership tenacity is determined by resilience, grit, and superintendents’ experiences. Resiliency contributes significantly to the tenacity of a superintendent when faced with the challenges of school leadership.

Older, more tenured administrators were found to be able to manage the stressors and strain of the job through intentional lifestyle and health choices, or from their experiences, could find a balance by separating work and self (Beisser et al., 2014). However, a more significant gap existed among younger aged and earlier career years, where administrators were less able to accomplish a healthy balance. Researchers also concluded that superintendents who hold doctoral degrees, have higher levels of education, and have more years of experience were associated with less stress, pressures, and workload, frequent use of coping mechanisms, maintained good health habits, and have higher total leadership effectiveness (Allison, 1997; Boyland, 2011; Reynolds & O’Dwyer, 2008; Yates & De Jong, 2018).

Beisser et al. (2014) also noted an implied relationship between stress levels and lifestyle behaviors. Those who were seldom stressed engaged in contact with other administrators, pursued personal interests, and practiced healthy eating habits. Superintendents should be able to identify the source of harmful stress in addition to finding effective coping mechanisms for success (Litchka et al., 2009). Moreover, Tekniepe (2015) stated, “Superintendents should learn how to interpret and predict the political landscape---both internal and external and adjust accordingly” (p. 10).

Coping strategies and hobbies mentioned by Lefdal and De Jong (2019) included humor, daily to-do lists, quality time with family, relying on peers, socializing, and exercising. Superintendents also shared the following coping mechanisms and strategies for creating a positive work-to-life balance, “finding a balance is important, time with family and allowing time to getaway, connecting with peers in the same position and visiting about how they are handling the stress, and exercising” (Lefdal & De Jong, 2019, pp. 69-71). Jones (2012) found having a personal vision for education as a successful tool when transitioning into the role of a new superintendent in Texas. Hawk and Martin (2011) determined that networking with peers assisted in decision-making and problem-solving, exercising and getting away alleviated stress, and seeking guidance or a mentor as effective coping strategies.

Other tools, skills, and coping mechanisms included keeping a realistic perspective, and maintaining a positive attitude (Allison, 1997), spending time with loved ones, and having an outlet outside work (Mahfouz, 2018), and interacting with the students (Beisser et al., 2014). It was additionally noted that building a relationship with board members/stakeholders (Williams et al., 2019), developing interpersonal skills

(Gmelch & Swent, 1982); self-regulating by remembering their guiding vision (Hyle et al., 2010), setting realistic goals, prioritizing needs, and balancing availability (Canales et al., 2010; Tekniepe, 2015) were all critical. Seeking support and having a personal mission statement as strategies were mentioned by Sogunro (2012). A single thematic finding of “relationships” was emphasized by Palladino et al. (2016) as it was identified as an imperative “core of their resistance, success, commitment, and joy as rural superintendents” (p. 43).

Workplace wellness programs were also strongly recommended. A significance of Lefdal and De Jong’s (2019) study noted,

As health care costs continue to increase and the need for decreased expenses in all educational settings becomes the focus of many state and federal programs, states are turning to employee wellness as an answer for some of these reductions.
(p. 58)

School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) offered its administrators a 6-month wellness program called CatchLife (Waldron et al., 2019). Waldron et al. conducted a follow-up study of 12 participating administrators. Respondents shared their awareness of the high levels of stress experienced as superintendents and the need for self-care. The administrators found that an increase in physical activity led to a decrease in stress levels and an increase in their well-being. This motivated many to make behavior changes, increase their desire to model wellness for their staff and find ways to create a culture of wellness for their schools.

According to Mansfield (2005), “The relationship between retirement, stress, and health-related issues should be further addressed with wellness programs” (p. vii).

Mansfield highly encouraged leaders to apply the core values and commitments found in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. By committing to maintaining one's physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness, superintendents could more effectively confront the stress that exists in their positions. For example, a U.S. military commander required its facility members to participate in a 3-day training workshop utilizing Covey's 1989 *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Carlone, 2001). Interviewees shared that "*The 7 Habits* helped him or her with challenges such as stress management, problem-solving, and listening" (p. 493).

Additionally, Johnson (2017) stated, "One of the ways in which we build character is by doing well through our habits" (p. 131). Johnson also shared the habits as listed by Covey that included Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw. "Sharpening the saw refers to the continual renewal of the physical, mental, social or emotional, and spiritual dimensions of the self. Healthy leaders care for their bodies through exercise, good nutrition, and stress management" (Covey, 1989, as cited in Johnson, 2017, p. 133).

As pointed out by Hawk and Martin (2011), the level of stress lessens when coping behaviors are effective. Canales et al. (2010) had a final question in their study regarding the techniques or strategies they used in dealing with the stress administrators encountered. One stress coping strategy utilized by five of the ten superintendents/principals interviewed was their strong faith. Superintendents interviewed credited prayer, God, and faith as ultimate stress relievers. Reave (2005) found that high levels of spiritual values and practice bring about increased personal resilience and leader motivation, relationships between leader and followers, and group productivity. Servant leadership is suggested as an effective leadership approach to

decrease stress and enhance individual health. The spiritual aspect of servant leadership as a coping mechanism that impacts superintendent effectiveness and decision-making has clearly emerged as a theme for this research focus. Spirituality is an anchor that has a significant correlation with the concept of stewardship or service and is “central to the practice of encouraging the heart” (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 417). According to Greenleaf (1977), the basic spiritual essence of servant leadership is *ethnos*, “*ethnos* is the sustaining force that holds one together under stress” (p. 82). The need for superintendents to maintain their physical, psychological, spiritual, and ethical well-being for self and others should be of concern to all stakeholders.

Furthermore, Blacher-Wilson (2004) stressed the importance of school leaders completing an inner search “for the purpose of spiritual formation if they are to become school leaders who set themselves apart with purpose, values, collegiality, and virtues” (p.82). Finally, Johnson (2017) noted that leaders’ decision-making and communication abilities suffer as a result of stress. Therefore, servant leaders should appreciate the spiritual resources of listening, reflecting, meditating, praying, journaling, and spiritual reading. “Leaders who engage in such activities are more effective because they experience less stress, enjoy improved mental and physical health, and develop stronger relationships with others” (p. 175).

As leaders, their abilities or inabilities to cope with the demands, challenges, and perceived stressors impacts not only their health and wellness but also their performance and the wellness of the organization – followers, students, stakeholders, and even the community (Boyland, 2011; Jacobs. 2019). “Chronic stress can also impact job performance and could negatively affect a principal’s ability to lead a school effectively”

(Boyland, 2011, p. 6). Researchers also found that the level of stress lessens when coping behaviors are effective, suggesting that “as the use of coping strategies increases, so does their effectiveness as leaders” (Reynolds & O’Dwyer, 2008, p. 492). An exploration of 10 East Texas rural superintendents’ principle-centered leadership indicated the most compelling influence for superintendency effectiveness was family and faith, followed by being service oriented (Davidson & Butcher, 2017). Eight of the participants stressed the importance of Christianity in their character, and all ten of the participants stressed leading balanced lives. Seven of the ten superintendents cited the value of church, bible study, faith, prayer, and God for promoting their emotional growth. The key, then, is to find the right balance, discover what works, and seek strategies and tools to cope with the demands and stressors that will impact overall health and wellness, as well as decision-making and job performance.

Decision-Making and Job Performance

“When school administrators are emotionally exhausted, overworked and fail to prioritize their own wellbeing, they typically become frustrated, and their performance is hindered” (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 3). One of the many hats worn by superintendents featured in Copeland’s (2013) study is that of manager with decision-making noted as a sub-role. In a qualitative study, McClellan et al. (2010) collected data from focus groups of 35 superintendents interviewed from small school districts across the nation as they attempted to categorize superintendents’ decision-making processes. They maintained that superintendents’ decisions were driven by doing what is best for students, recognizing that there is often no right answer, realizing that many decisions are situational, and balancing multiple priorities. Additionally, Gmelch and Swent (1982)

concluded that administrators were found to perceive gaining public approval and making decisions affecting the lives of others as stressful, “primarily superintendents and principals – were most troubled by having to make decisions affecting the lives of their colleagues, staff members, and students” (p. 24).

Selart and Johansen’s (2011) two-part study found that ethical dilemmas were not affected by the effect of stress. However, it was noted that ethical dilemmas in real-life situations are not so easily filtered and recognized as they are in written scenarios. It was also reported that lack of feedback/reward, stress from lack of information, and even powerlessness all impact the inability to recognize ethical dilemmas, which may negatively affect ethical decision-making. The second part of the study showed that stressful situations leading to harmful stress levels among the decision-makers would lead to more frequent unethical behaviors. Moreover, Litchka et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of superintendents’ awareness of and recognizing the effects of stress on their overall performance.

Bruner (1998) interviewed 47 superintendents and their coworkers for a total of 141 respondents to determine perceptions of power and its relation to making decisions in either a top-down or collaborative fashion. The qualitative study found superintendents defined power in three categories: power as power over, which is a dominance power, power with/to, which is a collaborative or shared power, and power defined as mixed definition. An example descriptor of power over, top-down superintendent read, “She definitely lets you know that things need to be done her way” (p. 4). Additionally, a superintendent quote describing power with/to as collaborative read, “She resisted the temptation to take the front position and recognized that the win had to be in a plurality.

She listens, collaborates, and gets the best out of the people who are available to her” (p. 5). Still, another superintendent expressed her perception of power as serving others and bringing people together, “Power, to me, means serving. It’s servant leadership” (p. 4). Brunner contended that power with/to superintendents are better able to implement shared decision-making. These servant leadership traits are related to trust, relationships and directly impact the organizational culture and performance (Williams & Hatch, 2012). When a superintendent practices servant leadership through team building and a shared vision, the result will positively impact the school district through organizational performance.

Tekniepe (2015) found that shared decision-making issues led to undue stress, while Hawk and Martin (2011) maintained that networking with peers assisted in decision-making and problem-solving, which alleviated some of stress. Sogunro (2012) suggested having a personal mission statement as a self-monitoring behavior. Covey (2004) maintained a mission statement “becomes a personal constitution, the basis for making major, life-directing decisions, the basis for making daily decisions in the midst of the circumstances and emotions that affect our lives” (p. 61). The spiritual ideology of leader practitioners referred to by Perkins et al. (2009) maintained, “The summation of spirituality is having an anchor that provides the courage to do that, which is right for others in a manner that is caring, just, equitable, and democratic” (Discussion section, para. 8). Therefore, when decisions are made for the good of others, there will be no regrets.

Empowerment provided by servant leadership develops a sense of choice, enabling others the opportunity to take ownership in the decision-making process (Taylor

et al., 2007). “The empowered spiritual scholar-practitioner will reflect without regret because his/her decisions and actions were made for the good of others” (Perkins et al., 2009, Discussion section, para. 8). As visionary leaders, superintendents need the servant leadership characteristic of foresight in making decisions (Crippen & Wallen, 2008). Copeland and Calhoun (2014) found that all superintendents had positive and beneficial experiences regarding their involvement with mentoring, specifically the feeling of being supported. One superintendent shared, “It would be nice to have people to tell us how you manage your emotions in this job, how to detach when you make a decision and what do you have to do to take care of yourself” (p. 38). Haecker et al. (2017) concluded that the use of evidence-based decision-making relied on leaders’ knowledge, beliefs, and overall self-confidence. Finally, Johnson (2017) asserted that leaders’ decision-making and communication abilities suffer as a result of stress. Therefore, superintendents as servant leaders should appreciate the spiritual resources of listening, reflecting, meditating, praying, journaling, and spiritual reading. “Leaders who engage in such activities are more effective because they experience less stress, enjoy improved mental and physical health, and develop stronger relationships with others” (p. 175).

The role of a single rural superintendent who had been a part of his district for almost 40 years was examined by Jenkins (2007) in a two-year period. This tenured superintendent noted, “The rural superintendent who does not give serious consideration (without compromising principles) to the community’s reaction when making a decision, is a superintendent who is destined for a short term” (p. 4). Although influenced by the diversity of his community, self-interest and personal preferences were rarely factors in decision-making. The superintendent shared that an inner voice, a moral compass, and his

ethics and values guide his decision making. In the case of a sole administrator, there can only be a consensus of one for final decisions. When faced with a dilemma, he considers various entities and takes full responsibility for his decisions.

When discussing the superintendents' decision-making process, Hyle et al. (2010) found it a complicated, multidimensional, and dynamic process involving intertwining variables that change as the problem changes. Examples of the complexities in the decision-making process include: shared reasoning rather than remote mandates (Barley & Beesely, 2007), inclusive and continuous communication with stakeholders (Decman et al., 2018; Lamkin, 2006), balanced processing using data-driven strategies (Bird et al., 2013), evidence-based practices (Haecker et al., 2017), and through the lens of student impact and making decisions based on core values and vision (Davidson & Butcher, 2017; Decman et al., 2018). Rewarding aspects of the superintendency included helping students succeed, helping staff achieve their goals, and making decisions (Yates & De Jong, 2018).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive review of empirical research to explore leadership, specifically executive leadership with an emphasis on rural superintendency, to identify and synthesize the empirical research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, which in turn affects their decision-making and job performance. Guided by an adapted analytical rubric and conceptual framework presented by Hallinger (2014) phrased as questions: (a) What are the central topics of interest, guiding questions, and goals?; (b) What conceptual perspective guides the

review's selection, evaluation, and interpretation of the studies?; (c) What are the sources and types of data employed in the review?; (d) What is the nature of the data evaluation and analysis employed in the review?; and (e) What are the major results of the review? As demonstrated, through a thorough analysis of each of these questions, summarized responses are shown respectively: (a) rural superintendents maintaining their personal, physical, and emotional wellness; (b) conducting a comprehensive review of the empirical research on the stressors, coping mechanisms, and wellness of rural superintendents; (c) collecting data comprised of peer-reviewed, empirical studies with set criteria; (d) synthesizing paradigm methodologies and key findings; and (e) organizing and presenting the analyzed and synthesized findings of the research focus in a V-shaped literature review beginning with major topics and narrowing down to minor topics. This review has also revealed a content framework for the emerged themes of stressors and the spiritual dimension of servant leadership as the theoretical lens to view a leader's impact on individual and organizational health.

The majority of the studies reviewed are qualitative in nature. Researchers utilized qualitative methodology that included, (a) interviews that ranged from being in-depth, face-to-face, via phone, semi-structured, to focus group sessions with open-ended questions that were audio-recorded; (b) document collecting and reviewing, site-visits, and observations; along with (c) transcribing, coding, categorizing, and member checking; as well as the use of (d) the constant comparative analysis, grounded theory, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and looking at data through specific lenses; some even including (e) journaling with a holistic overview of the narrative and little or no standardized instrumentation. The quantitative studies were statistical in nature and

included, (a) survey questionnaires based on indexes and descriptive statistics; that were (b) pilot and field-tested for validity and clarity; (c) significant difference tested by analysis of variance; (d) post hoc analysis for multiple comparisons; (e) logistic regression analysis to model the relation; and (f) data examined using percentages, means, and standard deviations (where a $p < .05$ used as level of statistical significance). Mixed methods studies used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology, as well as, (a) triangulation convergence; (b) content analysis and content validation along with confirmatory factor analysis; (c) data analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics; and (e) using a specific mixed-method model design.

The studies' sample size ranged from a qualitative study of a single rural superintendent to 1,865 superintendents across the United States who completed an online national survey for a quantitative study. Participant selection for the studies reviewed included, (a) modified versions of specific methods, (b) a five-step criterion-based sampling method, (c) random sampling method, (d) purposeful sampling method, (e) snowball sampling, (f) participants who met sampling criteria as set by researchers, (g) non-probability purposive sampling, and (h) convenience sampling.

Limitations

This review's key limitation is the omitted studies that did not meet the set criteria or were review types, theoretical, or not empirical in nature. Despite the extensive review of the literature, it is noted that the adoption of a full systematic review approach is more appropriately effective when employed in its entire methodical process. However, elements of this comprehensive, in-depth methodology approach are effectively incorporated into this literature review. Although the research focus is not value neutral,

it is the overall conceptual framework for gathering research without population or subject limitations so that collected articles include principals, higher education, teachers, and even business leaders, rather than just superintendents. It should be acknowledged that there is limited research on the stressors and coping mechanisms utilized by superintendents, but most especially on how rural superintendents maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness. Further limitations of this review of prior research include only considering public school superintendents as well as disregarding research on urban and suburban superintendents. A final limitation is that this review presented the detriments of stressors and did not address the potential benefits of stress.

Limitations mentioned in the literature reviewed include questions framed in such a way as to identify problems or concerns, studies focused on one state, limited to the number or gender of participants and demographic factors, and dense populations of poverty, cultural or ethnic diversity. In addition, some of the studies were subjective, relied on self-reporting or memories of distant events, assumed respondent honesty, could not be generalized to the total school leaders, or had a low response rate. Finally, limitations to the paradigm or methodology include sampling strategies, measurement models, study design, cross-sectional in nature, and low instrument reliability.

Implications

The results of this review of empirical studies reflect the lack of research on the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms utilized by rural superintendents to maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness. Superintendents are forced to prioritize and do more with less (Canales et al., 2010), perceptions of superintendent and board relationships exhibit a disconnect in expectations (Yates & De Jong, 2018), the impact of

the prioritizing of school district politics (Decman et al., 2017). The failure to tackle the challenge of balancing passion and healthy lifestyle priorities will likely result in diminished health over time and reduce leadership effectiveness (Beisser et al., 2014), bring about anxiety and depression (Litchka et al., 2009), and fatigue and impaired decision-making (Selart & Johansen, 2011).

Theoretical Implications

Leadership characteristics of servant leadership and its spiritual dimension have been chosen as the theoretical lens to view a leader's impact on individual and organizational health. "Servant-leadership, first proposed by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970, is a theoretical framework that advocates a leader's primary motivation and role as service to others" (Smith, 2005, p. 3). Moreover, the central characteristics of servant leadership practices, conducive to health and wellness, as outlined by Spears (2004), included listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people's growth, and building community. The spiritual aspect of servant leadership as a coping mechanism that impacts superintendent effectiveness and decision-making has clearly emerged as a theme for this research focus. Wheatley (2002, as cited in Perkins et al., 2009) implied,

Leaders strengthened by faith, who act as servant leaders, find the courage to face the challenges of life. She further explained, 'Chaos can't be controlled' (p. 42) nor, can the unpredictable be predicted in life. Therefore, we must have a firm theoretical foundation on which to face the call or vocation of educational leadership. (Background section, para. 5)

Spirituality is an anchor that has a significant correlation with the concept of stewardship or service and is “central to the practice of encouraging the heart” (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 417). Northouse (2019) contends that the servant leader will nurture self, create a solid and healthy workplace, and positively influence others through these characteristics. Finally, it was also suggested that healing for others and the organization might be provided through stewardship, a servant leadership characteristic, “but it may be that more needs to occur in the area of self-healing for superintendents whose work environments are often stressful and over-busy” (p. 562). Therefore, servant leadership is suggested as an effective leadership approach to decrease stress and enhance individual health, thus meaning “we must have a firm theoretical foundation on which to face the call or vocation of educational leadership” (Perkins et al., 2009, Background section, para. 5).

Practical Implications

Superintendents must be offered the opportunity to engage in problem-solving professional development, stress management training, and wellness programs and support systems (Hawk & Martin, 2011; Litchka et al., 2009). The importance of wellness should be evident in the system’s vision and purpose (Sackney et al., 2000). Practitioners, professional organizations, and universities should rethink preparation programs, and organizations/state agencies should work together to offer greater awareness in professional training programs so that superintendents are better prepared to cope with stress (Canales et al., 2008; Lamkin, 2006, Richardson, 1998). Preparation programs should know what the literature says, provide specialized training and support, practical application, and incorporate skills proven to work (Hyle et al., 2010). Equipping

leaders with a useful guide when thinking about what practices and beliefs about power are required to implement the innovation of collaborative decision-making successfully is crucial (Brunner, 1998). Acknowledging that servant leadership training is not just for leaders but should be nurtured and cultivated in every classroom (Taylor et al., 2007). University superintendency preparation programs should be encouraged to provide in-depth instruction of synthesizing empirical research of specifically rural superintendents' occupational stressors to deepen their own understanding of stressors and coping mechanisms in rural superintendency (Allred et al., 2017; Klatt, 2014).

Recommended Future Studies

The review of prior research offers implications for future research. Several researchers found the need for further studies in the general theme of rural educational leadership (Garn, 2003; Williams & Nierengarten, 2011), on the cause of public unrest and distrust of educators (Gmelch & Swent, 1982), identifying superintendent stressors and well-being on a larger scale (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015; 2016), and research in areas of spirituality as a coping strategy (Canales et al., 2010).

Conclusion

In summary, the systematic review of the literature reveals that today's superintendents deal with complex challenges, demands, pressures, accountabilities, and expectations. These challenges and other rural leadership challenges lead to stressors, impacting health and wellness, as well as overall performance effectiveness. Nevertheless, the research validates that superintendents have a desire, a calling to serve and make a difference, and find their service to be rewarding (Boyland, 2013; Davidson & Butcher, 2017; Eva et al., 2019). Therefore, maintaining personal,

physical, and emotional wellness is crucial to one's well-being and promotes ethical decision-making and effective performance. Consequently, it is essential to understand the stress levels and health conditions, as well as the means superintendents use to bring about overall wellness. Poor choices in maintaining one's health among superintendents can lead to poor decision-making while providing leadership and managing the day-to-day operations of a school district.

An image of the small, rural school superintendency helps understand the pressures, stressors, and demands as they relate to the impact of a superintendent's overall health. As indicated by Robinson and Shakeshaft (2016), there is a need to draw attention to the stressors of the superintendency and coping mechanisms and health and wellness programs. "We must help those who are suffering, but we must do more by preventing distress where we can and building on positive, strength factors where possible" (Rossi et al., 2009, as cited in Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2016, p. 130).

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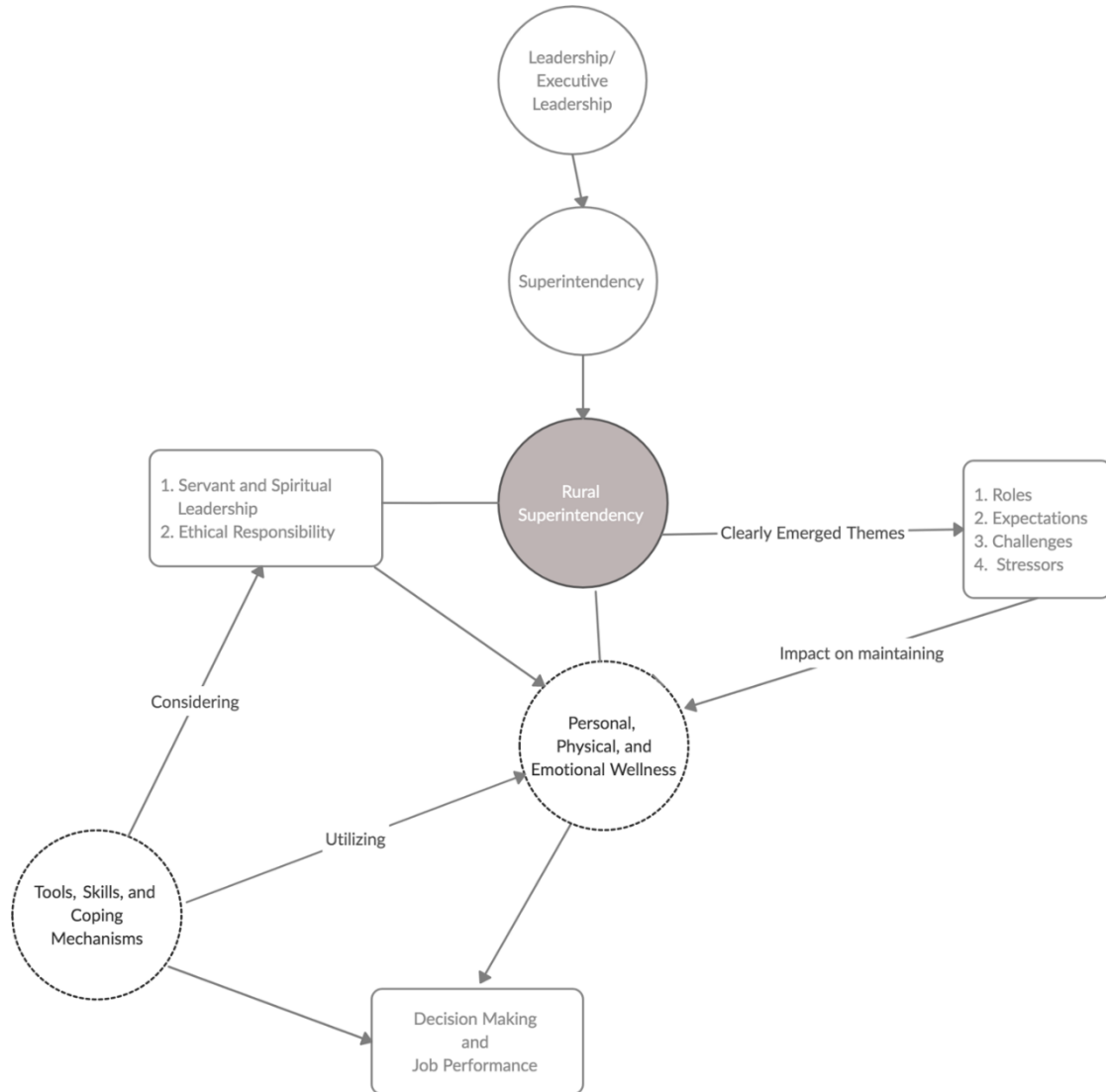
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Appendix A

Concept Map of Variables, Relationships, and Correlations



Note. To indicate a causal relationship, each arrow starts from the independent variable (the cause) and points to the dependent variable (the effect). A line is used to represent an expected correlation between two variables, but no cause-and-effect relationship.

Appendix B

Keywords Used for the Literature Search.

Leadership	Educational Leadership/Superintendency/ Rural Superintendency/Principal	AND History/ Leadership Styles/ Ethical Responsibility
AND		
Wellness	Maintaining/Personal/Physical/Emotional	OR Health/Illness/Mental/ Spiritual
OR		
Stress/ Strain	Expectations/Demands/Challenges	Superintendency/ Rural Superintendency
AND		
Coping	Mechanisms/Tools/Skills/Strategies	OR Balance/Relationships/ Faith/Resilience
AND		
Affects	Decision-Making/Job Performance	

Appendix C

Analytical Rubric Applied to Assessment of the Research

#	Criteria/ Level	Does Not Meet Standard	Partially Meets Standard	Meets Standard
		0	1	2
1.	Abstract	Abstract not included.	Aim and scope not clearly stated or major points are not summarized.	Clearly stated aim and scope; concisely summarized major points.
2.	Statement of Goal/ Purpose	No clear definition of the research problem or questions behind the research.	The research has articulated a topical focus, but this is not clearly defined in terms of research goals, outcomes, or questions.	The research problem and specific research goals or questions are attempted or clearly articulated with appropriate rationale for its importance.
3.	Framework: Conceptual/ Theoretical	No conceptual/theoretical framework is used in the research and no justification for its omission.	The research applies a conceptual/theoretical framework but it lacks either articulation or justification.	An explicit conceptual/theoretical framework to guide the research is articulated and justified or a clear rationale is offered for why it is not used.
4.	Method/ Paradigm	Methodology design, plan of analysis, measurement instrumentation, and research context not discussed and are unclear to the reader.	Methodology design, plan of analysis, measurement instrumentation, and research context are implicit but can be ascertained by the reader.	Methodology design, plan of analysis, measurement instrumentation, and research context are clearly stated and executed.
5.	Context/ Setting/ Sample	No discussion of the general population, target population, the study sample, and sample size.	Discussion of the general population, target population, the study sample, and sample size is limited.	Full description of the general population, target population, the study sample, actual sample size with description of sampling procedures.
6.	Presentation of Findings	Presentation of findings does not clarify how the results advance our understanding of the research problem.	Presentation of findings emphasizes analysis more than synthesis and/or only partially clarifies how the results advance our understanding of the research problem.	Synthesizes findings across studies and clearly communicates what was learned and how this advances understanding of the research problem.
7.	Discussion (Limitations/ Implications)	No explicit discussion of how the findings are limited by the methodology of the research and no discussion of implications.	Limitations of the research mentioned but not directly linked to the interpretation of results, or discussion of implications could be vague, overstated or incomplete (i.e., omits implications for a relevant audience).	Limitations of the research are described and linked to interpretation of results and a comprehensive set of implications described for all relevant audiences of the review (e.g., scholars, policymakers, and/or practitioners).

Note. Rubric adapted from Hallinger (2014).

Appendix D

Evaluation of Reviews of Research on Seven Criteria

No.	Author	Year	Journal	Total Cites	Criterion							Total Rubric Score
					1. Abstract	2. Goals/Purpose	3. Framework	4. Method/Paradigm	5. Sample Size	6. Results/Findings	7. Discussion (L/I)	
1	Sackney, L., Noonan, B., & Miller, C. M.	2000	<i>IJLE</i>	43	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
2	Taylor, T., Martin, B. N., Hutchinson, S., & Jinks, M.	2007	<i>IJLE</i>	314	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
3	Crippen, C. & Wallen, D.	2008	<i>EMAL</i>	48	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
4	Reynolds, C.H. & O'Dwyer, L. M.	2008	<i>JSJ</i>	35	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
5	Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C.	2008	<i>JMS</i>	1,015	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
6	Bigham, G., & Nix, S. J.	2011	<i>AIJ: EPR</i>	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
7	Bredeson, P. V., Klar, H. W., & Johansson, O.	2011	<i>EPAA</i>	98	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
8	Jones, N.B.	2012	<i>AIJ: EPR</i>	10	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
9	Williams, S.M., & Hatch, M.L.	2012	<i>JOLL</i>	38	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
10	Palladino, J. M., Haar, J. M., Grady, M., & Perry, K	2016	<i>JRRE</i>	24	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
11	Richards, K. A. R., Levesque-Bristol, C., Templin, T. J., & Graber, K. C.	2016	<i>SPE: AIJ</i>	83	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14

No.	Author	Year	Journal	Criterion								Total Rubric Score
				Total Cites	1. Abstract	2. Goals/Purpose	3. Framework	4. Method/Paradigm	5. Sample Size	6. Results/Findings	7. Discussion (L/I)	
12	Jacobs, C.M.	2019	<i>SAGE</i>	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
13	Klocko, B. A., Justis, R. J., & Kirby, E. A.	2019	<i>EL:JD SCD</i>	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14
14	Gmelch & Swent	1982	<i>PP</i>	82	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
15	Richardson	1998	<i>PP</i>	26	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
16	Jenkins, C.	2007	<i>RE</i>	58	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
17	Trevino, D., Jr., Braley, R. T., Brown, M. S., & Slate, J. R.	2008	<i>FJEAP</i>	76	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
18	Hyle, A.E., McClellan, R.L., & Ivory, G.	2010	<i>JRLE</i>	29	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
19	Boyland, L. G.	2011	<i>CIE</i>	79	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
20	Hawk, N. & Martin, B.	2011	<i>EMAL</i>	65	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
21	Williams, J.M. & Nierengarten, G.	2011	<i>RE</i>	31	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
22	Forner, M., Bierlein-Palmer, L., & Reeves, P.	2012	<i>JRRE</i>	121	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
23	Bird, J. J., Dunaway, D. M., Hancock, D. R., & Wang, C.	2013	<i>LPS</i>	70	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
24	Boyland, L.	2013	<i>P&C</i>	15	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
25	Copeland, J.D.	2013	<i>QR</i>	61	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
26	Isernhagen, J. & Bulkin, N.	2013	<i>AWIL</i>	12	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13

No.	Author	Year	Journal	Total Cites	Criterion							Total Rubric Score
					1. Abstract	2. Goals/Purpose	3. Framework	4. Method/Paradigm	5. Sample Size	6. Results/Findings	7. Discussion (L/I)	
27	Beisser, S.R. Peters, R.E., & Thacker, V.M.	2014	NAASP	31	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
28	Copeland, S.M. & Calhoun, D.W.	2014	IJELP	36	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
29	Mahfouz, J.	2018	EMAL	10	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
30	Waldron, J. J., Alborn-Yilek, S., Gute, G., Schares, D., & Huckstadt, K.	2019	JSL	0	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	13
31	Williams, H. P., Shoup, K., Durham, L. C., Johnson, B. A., Dunstan, S., Brady, B. A., & Siebert, C. F.	2019	SLR	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	13
32	Budge	2006	JRRE	237	1	2	2	2				
33	Garn, G.	2003	RE	14	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	12
34	Lamkin, M.L.	2006	RE	156	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
35	Barley, Z. & Beesley, A.D.	2007	JRRE	361	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
36	Canales, M.T., Tejeda-Delgado, C. & Slate, J.R.	2008	RE	97	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
37	McClellan, R. L., Hyle, A. E., & Ivory, G.	2010	AASA: JSP	6	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12

No.	Author	Year	Journal	Criterion								Total Rubric Score
				Total Cites	1. Abstract	2. Goals/Purpose	3. Framework	4. Method/Paradigm	5. Sample Size	6. Results/Findings	7. Discussion (L/I)	
38	Selart, M. & Johansen, S. T.	2011	<i>JBE</i>	129	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
39	Grissom, J. A., & Andersen, S.	2012	<i>AERJ</i>	155	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	12
40	Sogunro, O.A.	2012	<i>JSL</i>	59	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
41	Hendricks, S.	2013	<i>ELR</i>	13	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	12
42	Klatt, R	2014	<i>JSL</i>	15	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
43	Nix, S. J., & Bigham, G.	2015	<i>SLR</i>	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
44	Robinson, K.K. & Shakeshaft, C.	2015	<i>PC</i>	7	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
45	Tekniepe, R. J.	2015	<i>JRRE</i>	54	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
46	Robinson, K. & Shakeshaft, C.	2016	<i>JEHD</i>	5	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	12
47	Allred, P. D., Maxwell, G. M., & Skrla, L. E.	2017	<i>AWIL</i>	24	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
48	Haecker, B.M., Lane, F. C., & Zientek, L.R.	2017	<i>JSL</i>	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
49	Decman, J. M., Badgett, K., Shaughnessy, B., Randall, A., Nixon, L., & Lemley, B.	2018	<i>EMAL</i>	10	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
50	Bell, J.J.	2019	<i>AASA: JSP</i>	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12
51	Lefdal, J. & De Jong, D.	2019	<i>AASA: JSP</i>	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	12

No.	Author	Year	Journal	Total Cites	Criterion							Total Rubric Score
					1. Abstract	2. Goals/Purpose	3. Framework	4. Method/Paradigm	5. Sample Size	6. Results/Findings	7. Discussion (L/I)	
52	Allison, D. G.	1997	<i>JEAH</i>	127	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	11
53	Davidson, S., & Butcher, J. T.	2017	<i>SLR</i>	1	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	11
54	Yates, S. & De Jong, D.	2018	<i>AASA: JSP</i>	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	1	11
55	Brunner	1998	<i>CE</i>	46	1	1	0	2	2	2	2	10
56	Litchka, P., Fenzel, M., & Polka, W.S.	2009	<i>IJELP</i>	18	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	10
57	Perkins, G., Wellman, N., & Wellman, W.	2009	<i>AL:TOJ</i>	32	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	10
58	Canales, M.T., Tejeda-Delgado, C. & Slate, J.R.	2010	<i>IJELP</i>	20	0	2	1	2	2	2	1	10
Total criterion scores					97	113	84	116	116	116	88	
Mean criterion scores					1.67	1.95	1.45	2	2	2	1.52	

Note. Each criterion in a column was evaluated on a 0-2 scale, 0 = *criterion not met*, 1 = *criterion partially met*, 2 = *criterion met*.

Total cites refers to the total number of citations accumulated by the article since its date of publication. Journals included in the systematic review can be found in Appendix E.

Appendix E

Peer-reviewed, Empirical Journals Included in Systematic Review

No.	Journal	Abbreviation	Count
1.	AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice	AASA:JSP	4
2.	American Educational Research Journal	AERJ	1
3.	Administrative Issues Journal: Education, Practice, and Research	AIJ:EPR	2
4.	Academic Leadership: The Online Journal	AL:TOJ	1
5.	Advancing Women in Leadership	AWL	2
6.	Contemporary Education	CE	1
7.	Current Issues in Education	CIE	1
8.	Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.E.A.	EL:JDSCD	1
9.	Education Leadership Review	ELR	1
10.	Educational Management Administration & Leadership	EMAL	4
11.	Education Policy Analysis Archives	EPAA	1
12.	Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy	FJEAP	1
13.	International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation	IJELP	3
14.	International Journal of Leadership in Education	IJLE	2
15.	Journal of Business Ethics	JBE	1
16.	Journal of Educational Administration and History	JEAH	1
17.	Journal of Education and Human Development	JEHD	1
18.	Journal of Management Studies	JMS	1
19.	Journal of Organizational Learning and Leadership	JOLL	1

	Journal	Abbreviation	Count
20.	Journal of Research on Leadership Education:	JRLE	1
21.	Journal of Research in Rural Education	JRRE	5
22.	Journal of School Leadership	JSL	5
23.	Leadership and Policy in Schools	LPS	1
24.	National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin	NASSP Bulletin	1
25.	Planning and Changing	PC	2
26.	Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association	PP:AMAERA	1
27.	Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the University Council for Educational Administration	PP:ACUCEA	1
28.	Qualitative Report	QE	1
29.	Rural Educator	RE	5
30.	Sara and George Publications Open	SAGE Open	1
31.	School Leadership Review	SLR	3
32.	Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal	SPE:AIJ	1
		Published	58
32	Journals	Articles	

Note. The 58 peer-reviewed, empirical published articles obtained from 32 scholarly or academic journals (n = 32).

Appendix F

Search Results of Selected Research Articles Using Three Different Lenses

Content Lens		
		Total
Method		
	Quantitative	17
	Qualitative	27
	Mixed-Method	15
Focus Groups		
	Leadership	34
	Servant Leadership	7
	Superintendent	23
	Rural Superintendent	27
	Principal	17
	Teacher	6
	Others (such as board member, central office, city manager, business manager etc.)	23
Purpose		
	Maintaining Wellness	11
	Coping Mechanisms	12
	Decision-Making and Job performance	16
Emerging Themes		
	Stress	20
	Spirituality	8

Note. Rubric adapted from Gumus et al. (2018). Some articles were categorized in two or more categories.

Appendix G

Summaries of Peer-Reviewed, Empirical Articles that Relate to the Research Focus

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
1982 Gmelch, W.H. & Swent, B	To identify the perceptions school administrators have concerning the sources of their occupational stress.	This quantitative research study surveyed 1,211 full-time administrators from the Confederation of Oregon Schools. All administrators were found to perceive gaining public approval and making decisions affecting the lives of others as stressful. Superintendents perceived more stress from complying with rules and policies than the other subgroups followed by gaining public approval.
1997 Allison, D.G.	To identify the most common coping techniques, categories of coping techniques, differences in preferred coping techniques, the inter-relationship between coping techniques and stress, and compare and contrast principals' coping responses.	This mixed-methods research study surveyed 643 secondary principals and asked two open-ended follow-up questions. Responses to the Coping Preference Scale indicated the most popular coping techniques used by school administrators are stress management techniques, e.g. keeping a realistic perspective, maintaining a positive attitude, following a good physical health program, and engaging in activities that support intellectual, social, and spiritual growth.
1998 Brunner, C. C.	To determine perceptions of power and its relation to making decisions in either a top-down or collaborative fashion.	This is a qualitative study included data collected from face-to-face interviews of 47 reputable superintendent participants and their coworkers for a total of 141 respondents. The researcher found superintendents defined power as power over, power with/to, and mixed definitions. Researchers were surprised to find most of the power over definitions came from men and most of the power with/to definitions came from women. But, they all superintendents use both types of power. The superintendents who defined power as with/to were more supportive and collaborative in their decision-making.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
1998 Richardson, L. M	To explore the major sources of stress among Connecticut's superintendents, and the presence of the four stress factors.	This mixed-methods exploratory study included data collected from 108 superintendent survey responses and 16 face-to-face interviews. Both the ASI survey and the personal interviews revealed politics, heavy workload/ time, and board relations as the top three major sources of stress. Major stressors have a significant impact on superintendents' personal and professional lives that produce feelings of anger, resentment, frustration and anxiety, which brought about feeling powerless, hurt, devalued, unappreciated, and lonely. Coping strategies and approaches employed were hard physical exercise, delegating tasks, talking to friends, communicating with board members, and venting with their spouse.
2000 Sackney, L., Noonan, B., & Miller, C. M.	To assess the educational wellness of administrators, classroom teachers, and support staff in an urban school jurisdiction.	Through a survey questionnaire with a follow-up open-ended question, researchers found perceptions of organizational wellness conditions are affected by ones job type. Sackney et al. (2000) found total health and well-being are contingent on a balance of all six dimensions of wellness. Support personnel and teachers perceived their wellness less positively and favorably than administrators. Sackney et al., (2000) contended it is important to provide organizational and individual encouragement for spiritual wellness, a wellness that includes character and moral education and is not restricted to religious beliefs.
2003 Garn, G.	To collect precise information about the characteristics of and problems faced by superintendents in Oklahoma. To contribute to the national discussion surrounding the rural school superintendency.	Garn (2003) found several similarities between the national survey data and the Oklahoma data of this quantitative descriptive study. Superintendents surveyed maintained their primary tasks and responsibilities included budget/finance, personnel issues, working with the board, and public relations. Surprisingly, Garn found 10% of rural superintendents surveyed were teaching one or more classes in their district. Furthermore, 24% were serving in a dual superintendent/ principal role. In comparison to the national average, Oklahoma superintendents were more likely to be white and male, and less likely to have a doctoral degree. Another contradiction was the overwhelmingly positive relationship Oklahoma superintendents had with board members.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2006 Budge, K.	To explore the influence of rurality and a sense of place on leaders' beliefs about purposes of local schooling and their concomitant theories of action in one rural school district.	Utilizing semi-structured interviews, document reviewing, and member checks, this qualitative case study interviewed 11 leaders of a rural school district located in the Deep Water Valley in the eastern end of Hampton county. This study questioned rural place as problem, privilege, or possibility. Budge (2006) found place as problem revealed a sense of isolation, oppression, limitations, and tension. Place as privilege was expressed through leaders' attachments to sense of belonging and extended family. Place as possibility found there is a need for a critical leadership of place, the need to improve the quality of life, that requires five areas of action, as the sense of place is not enough.
2006 Lamkin, M. L.	To understand the challenges and changes in the role of the rural superintendent of schools. The researcher looked for related issues and the emergence of patterns, which assisted in the establishment of analysis procedures.	This qualitative, grounded theory, exploratory research study interviewed seven focus groups that consisted of 58 rural superintendents from three different eastern states. Although rural superintendents experienced similar challenges faced by their urban and suburban colleagues, rural superintendents in this study expressed they lacked adequate training, faced environmental challenges the need of being the jack-of-all trades, increased demands, expected rural community relationships, involvement and visibility, and being forced to manage over leading.
2007 Barley, Z. & Beesley, A.D.	To identify a set of variables related to factors thought to contribute to rural school success.	This primarily qualitative study consisted of two phases. Twenty-one high needs rural schools across three central states were selected based on 2 years of state achievement data. Phase one included interviews with 21 principals. Researchers found high expectations for students, structural supports for learning, use of student data, and assessment as factors principals rated as very important to the contribution of their success. Phase two consisted of site visits and interviews. Researchers found the following common factors from each school: high expectations for all students and teacher retention.
2007 Jenkins, C.	To examine how the rural superintendent had navigated through his role by integrating the values of the community with his personal and professional values.	This qualitative study examined a single rural superintendent who had been a part of the school district for almost 40 years. Results of the multiple informal interviews and observations as well as a final formal interview, with data which were collected over a period of two years, included expected transparency and community involvement of small, rural public school superintendents, (including personal appearance, church attendance, attendance at school events and funerals. In the case of a sole administrator there can only be a consensus of one for final decisions. When faced with difficult dilemma, he considers various entities and takes full responsibility for all of his decisions.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2007 Taylor, T., Martin, B. N., Hutchinson, S., & Jinks, M.	To explore the leadership practices of principals who utilized servant leadership, then compare and contrast them with principals who did not utilize servant leadership and to a normative data set of business managers.	This quantitative study utilized two phases and two instruments to explore the leadership practices of principals who utilized servant leadership, then compared and contrasted them with principals who did not utilize servant leadership and business managers. Taylor et al. (2007) found the top three leadership behaviors of public school principals included modelling the way, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart of their followers. Identified servant leaders were perceived to be effective in all areas of the five elements of best leadership practices.
2008 Canales, M.T, Tejeda- Delgado, C. & Slate, J.R.	To identify effective leadership behaviors exhibited by superintendent/ principals as perceived by superintendent/ principals, by teachers, and school board presidents.	In this quantitative study 206 teachers, 35 school board presidents, and 37 superintendents/principals were surveyed. Representation was identified by all three subgroups as most prevalent. Both superintendent/principals and school board presidents agreed on the top three leadership behaviors required for leadership success: tolerance of freedom, representation, and consideration. Consideration was rated as the most effective leadership behavior by all three subgroups.
2008 Crippen, C., & Wallin, D.	To identify the mentors of superintendents and their particular leadership qualities analyzed through the critical lens of servant-leadership.	This qualitative, exploratory and perceptual study utilized open-ended interviews of nine Manitoba superintendents. Findings were analyzed through the critical lens of the characteristics of servant-leadership (Spears, 1998): listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, foresight, conceptualization, stewardship, growth of others, and building community. Findings revealed the top five similar leadership styles and mentor characteristics include: building community, persuasion, foresight, stewardship, and growth of others. Crippen and Walden (2008) contend that role responsibilities and work environments impact overall leadership style characteristics and mentor characteristics.
2008 Reynolds, C. H. & O'Dwyer, L. M.	To examine the relationship among principals' leadership effectiveness, emotional intelligence, and coping mechanisms for stress.	This quantitative study surveyed 65 middle school principals. The research found the scores for effectiveness and coping to be correlational. Researchers found the level of stress lessens when coping behavior is effective.
2008 Sendjaya, S., Sarros, J. C., & Santora, J. C.	To develop and validate a multidimensional measure of servant leadership behaviour, the literature guides the identification of dimensions and themes pertinent to servant leadership as a first step in this development.	This mixed methods study included interview data of 15 senior executives, content validation from a 15 member expert panel, and an empirical survey of 227 graduate students resulted in an extended servant leadership model characterized by its service orientation, holistic outlook, and moral-spiritual emphasis. Sendjaya et al., 2008 found servant leadership to be an altruistic leadership style that embodies a spiritual nature. This holistic model of servant leadership emphasized that spirituality and morality-ethics are a necessity.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2008 Treviño, D., Jr., Braley, R. T., Brown, M. S., & Slate, J. R.	To analyze the current challenges facing public school superintendents in South Texas.	This quantitative study of 46 south Texas superintendents utilized a six part survey and descriptive statistics to analyze current challenges facing school superintendents. Researchers found the greatest challenges facing superintendents included obtaining highly qualified teachers, lack of funding, curriculum and instruction issues, followed by political and governance issues. The more tenured the superintendent and in the same district, perceptions of challenges were lower than the less tenured the superintendent.
2009 Litchka, P., Fenzel, M., & Polka, W. S.	To examine the stress process among school superintendents, the various sources of stress, the effects of personal coping resources and social support on strain, and whether any of the coping and social support variables moderate the relation of stressors to strain.	This quantitative study surveyed 117 superintendents. Sources of stress included role ambiguity, role overload, and the responsibility one has for the welfare or performance of others. Low rational coping promoted positive relationship between stressors and symptoms. However, the higher the stressor, the quicker the increase in strain, especially for superintendents with lower levels of rational/cognitive coping competence. Sources of stress brought about 54% of self-perceived symptoms of depression and anxiety.
2009 Perkins, G. Wellman, N., & Wellman, W.	What is the relationship, if any, between educational leaders' spirituality and leadership practices?	This quantitative study surveyed 71 Texas principals to determine if spirituality is correlated with good leadership practices. The research hypothesis was supported by the data collected. There is a statistically significant relationship between educational leaders' spirituality and leadership practices especially in the following: leaders who model the way, leaders who inspire, leaders who challenge the process and do what is right, leaders who enable others to act, to problem solve, and leaders who encourage the heart: build teamwork and self-confidence and provide positive reinforcement.
2010 Canales, M.T, Tejeda- Delgado, C. & Slate, J.R.	To identify occupational stressors and role ambiguity that superintendent/principals encounter in the dual responsibility position along with coping strategies they utilize.	This qualitative study gathered data using in-depth, face-to-face interviews. Superintendent/principals noted major responsibilities that ranged from budget preparation, curriculum planning, staff development, facilities management, and to student discipline. All participants commented on the varied "hats" worn on an everyday basis. The most prevalent occupational stressor was not enough time to complete required tasks (time management), followed by being all things to all people, sense of responsibility, role ambiguity (wearing multiple hats), unclear job descriptions, and conflicting demands. A coping strategy utilized by half of the participants was their strong faith.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2010 Hyle, A. E., McClellan, R. L., & Ivory, G.	To explore what knowledge counts from the perspectives of small school-district superintendents, how they describe their learning, and the relationship between these realities and the development of hidden expert knowledge as a superintendent.	This qualitative study collected data from six focus groups, which focused on interviews with 37 superintendents from across the nation. Researchers found the following three themes of what knowledge counts in a small school district: impressions of competing visions, being the “center of the wheel,” and balancing/negotiating/ weighing decisions. When discussing the superintendents’ decision-making process Hyle et al. (2010) found it to be a complex, multidimensional and dynamic process that involves intertwining variables that change as the problem changes.
2010 McClellan, R. L., Hyle, A. E., & Ivory, G.	To explore how small school-district superintendents described their decision-making as a continuous act of weighing and balancing various factors.	This qualitative study collected data from six focus groups, which focused on interviews with 35 superintendents from small school districts (with fewer than 1,000 students) across the nation. Groups were categorized according to relationships and themes. Researchers utilized a looping form of data analysis as they attempted to categorize superintendents’ decision-making processes. Participants described knowledgeable decisions based on doing what is best for students, the specific small school district context, and the balancing act of multiple priorities. The researchers offer eight steps for reflective thinking.
2011 Bigham, G., & Nix, S. J.	To engage in a qualitative case study of the interim superintendency in search of information particular to the position to add to the knowledge base and assist interim superintendents in being successful and effective in fulfilling the job requirements.	This qualitative single case study of a researcher simultaneously filling the position of interim superintendent utilized phenomenological inquiry over a six month period. Bigham and Nix (2011) proposed the findings revealed the results fell into two categories of duties and roles of an interim superintendent and compared them with those of a regular superintendent. The various operational and managerial duties of the position were found to be similar. Although the duties were comparable, it was found the roles of an interim and regular superintendent differed in at least two vital areas. The regular superintendent should assume the role of visionary leader and not the interim superintendent. However, the interim should lay the foundation for the incoming superintendent to implement that vision.
2011 Boyland, L. G.	To gather and examine data regarding the job-related stress of elementary school principals and their successful coping strategies.	This mixed-methods study utilized a Likert-type scaled an opened-ended question survey of 193 principals. Principals rated their perceptions regarding stress about their positions as low stress, medium stress, and high stress with the majority experiencing moderate to high levels of stress and almost 40% of the principals in a high stress category. Some participants shared about health issues developed including high blood pressure, anxiety or depression, and headaches. Additionally, principals self-reported 20 most common coping strategies, which were presented in the appendix of the study.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2011 Bredeson, P. V., Klar, H. W., & Johansson, O.	To identify the specific variations in context which influence superintendents' leadership, and to examine how superintendents respond to these variations in context.	This cross-national qualitative study of twelve superintendents, six from Wisconsin and six from Sweden, using in-depth, structured interviews, found that in spite of differences in traditions, politics, geography, and culture, there were three central themes that characterize superintendent leadership. Respondents all agreed the main focus was the children, they also collectively noted a focus on vision and mission, followed by establishing trust and meaningful relationship with others. Although general administrative tasks were not found to be contextually different, distinctions became clearer in leaders' interactions and intentions within various situations of practice.
2011 Hawk, N., & Martin, B.	To determine the extent of stressors on superintendents and what coping mechanisms are utilized and how effective they were perceived. To address the reflections on the role of gender in relation to stress in the superintendency.	This mixed-methods study investigated 100 superintendents' perception of on the job stressors, as well as strategies used to manage and cope with stress. The authors found superintendents reported legislative mandates and budget restraints as major stressors. The most frequently used coping mechanisms were exercise, getting away, and mentoring. Qualitative findings established the board of education provided no known support to superintendents in developing stress management skills and coping strategies. Males believed not showing emotions/ feelings was advantageous. Females believed the opposite.
2011 Selart, M. & Johansen, S.T.	The focus of this study is on two different stages in Jones' ethical decision-model, that is, on the recognition of moral issues and on moral behavior.	This mixed-methods study consisted of a two part study. The first study included 38 project leader participants from three different multi-national Swedish engineering companies. This study showed the recognition of ethical dilemmas was not affected by the effect of stress. However, it was noted that ethical dilemmas in real-life situations are not so easily filtered and recognized as they are in written scenarios. The second study also included 38 project leader participants from the same three different multi-national Swedish engineering companies. This study showed stressful situations leading to negative stress levels among the decision-makers will lead to more frequent unethical behaviors.

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2011 Williams, J.M. & Nierengarten, G.	To provide a glimpse into the needs for assistance that exist specifically in Minnesota's rural schools in order to better understand the realities for rural school administrators and to generate recommendations for changes in policies and processes that do not create or continue obstacles and inequities.	This mixed methods study used an electronic survey and follow-up focus group interviews. Participating administrators ranked school district priorities as follows: attainment of student performance and learning goals and fiscal management. Needs for addressing the two priority concerns are testing and adequate year progress, achievement for all, staff and professional development, data analysis, balancing budgets, and transportation/sparsity.
2012 Fornier, M., Bierlein- Palmer, L., & Reeves, P.	To gain a better understanding of what effective leadership practices look like within a rural setting, and to see how such practices compare to the correlates postulated by Waters and Marzano's (2006) work.	This qualitative study examined leadership practices of seven rural superintendents. A multi-case study approach of seven rural school districts with four individuals from each district (minus one), which consisted of in-depth interviews of 27 participants. Overall, the seven superintendents in this study demonstrated practices consistent with Waters and Marzano's (2006) correlates of effective leadership practice.
2012 Grissom, J. A., & Andersen, S.	To address the gaps in the literature, this study pulls together existing research on superintendent turnover alongside a complementary—and perhaps more well-developed—stream of research on turnover among city managers to identify potential drivers of superintendents' decisions to leave.	This mixed-methods study identified factors contributing to superintendent turnover in California by matching original superintendent and school board survey data with administrative data and information hand-collected from news sources on why superintendents left and where they went. Grissom and Anderson (2012) found turnover was greatest in districts with a high economically disadvantaged enrollment, community dissatisfaction, negative board performance reviews, career advancement (using rural districts as “stepping stones”), and poor board relations. It was suggested to home grow superintendents and hire from within the district.
2012 Jones, N. B.	To examine the factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of a new superintendency in Texas.	This mixed-methods, descriptive study examined factors contributing to a successful transition into the role of new superintendency in Texas. Quantitative data were collected through surveys while a focus group was conducted for the qualitative data of 289 superintendent participants. Results reiterated the role of superintendent as more essential and challenging to execute with the demanding increase of accountability and expectations. Findings revealed the entry period to a new superintendency is critical, a plan is important, preparation programs are necessary, as are opportunities for professional development. Useful activities during the entry period were discovered. In addition, they ranked superintendent-board relations as a major issue affecting or inhibiting their superintendency.

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2012 Sogunro, O. A.	To investigate the causes of stress for principals, with the purpose of identifying some stress-coping tips to help them.	This qualitative study utilized fact-to-face interviews of 52 Connecticut principals. Findings were analyzed and categorized into seven main themes of stressors or factor causing stress. Moreover, unpleasant relationships and people conflicts ranked as the greatest source of stress with top three conflicts among teachers, interactions with difficult parents, and discipline issues with parents advocating in such a way as to undermine the school's authority. Additionally, coping tips emerged in five main themes. What works for one, may not work for all. However, that which works should be nurtured.
2012 Williams, S.M., & Hatch, M.L.	To explore servant leadership behaviors in superintendents as perceived by various stakeholders, specifically principals and school board members.	This mixed methods study explored servant leadership behaviors of 178 superintendents of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania utilizing an online survey of 178 stakeholders made up of 93 principals and 85 school board members. It was perceived that a superintendent with less than 12 years tenure is more likely to exhibit servant leadership traits. Leading via servant leadership directly impacts organizational performance. When a superintendent practices servant leadership through team building and a shared vision the result will be a positive impact to the school district through organizational performance.
2013 Bird, J. J., Dunaway, D. M., Hancock, D. R., & Wang, C.	To explore the relationship between superintendent leadership and the operational processes of school improvement. To examine the self-reports of superintendents concerning their leadership authenticity and their district's school improvement practices.	This mixed-methods study utilized a 16-item online authentic leadership questionnaire that included a self-report section and a 13-item school improvement questionnaire to survey 226 superintendents from six southern states. Findings were analyzed through an examination of descriptive statistics. Researchers found there is a positive relationship between superintendents' level of leadership authenticity and their districts' use of best practices in the school improvement process. Two elements of authentic leadership that allow for an unbiased manner of implementing operational procedures were relational transparency and balanced processing.

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2013 Boyland, L.	To explore principals' consideration for advancing to the superintendency and to investigate their current perceptions about the position.	Interpreting the results of this quantitative exploratory study of 87 principals' perceptions of the superintendency, Boyland (2013) found 96.6% percent of the principals surveyed from all five states agreed that the superintendency is a stressful position and 73% agreed it was also rewarding. Not only did the majority of urban principals perceive the superintendency as most stressful, but they were also the least interested. Reasons for avoiding the superintendency were reported as follows: school budget concerns, lack of school board support, removal from students, the politics of the position, the time commitment, and too much stress.
2013 Copeland, J. D.	To further define the differences - if they emerged - that the expectations of a rural superintendent in small schools in northeast Colorado vary from expectations in larger and more urban school districts.	This qualitative research study was conducted using semi-structured, triangulated interviews with three rural superintendents and three board members on the roles of rural school superintendents, the many hats worn, and the expectation differences between urban and rural school superintendents. Even though five significant roles of a superintendent emerged from this study, identified as manager, planner, listener, communicator, and involvement in the community, it was revealed rural superintendents perform many additional duties as needed. Copeland (2013) found that small, rural school superintendents are expected to personally address any problems that may arise. Superintendents wear many hats, some are worn voluntarily while others are forced to be worn.
2013 Hendricks, S.	To determine if certain biographical variables of the school board members influenced his/her perception of the superintendent's job effectiveness.	This quantitative study utilized a 40-item survey instrument to determine if there was a significant interaction between the 10 dependent variables of superintendent effectiveness and the eight independent variables of board ownership. Hendricks (2013) found no significant interaction effect between board member ownership and each of the seven bias factors. The study did reveal interesting findings about board demographics, Texas boards are comprised mostly of Caucasian males whose highest education level consisted of a high school diploma or an associate's degree.
2013 Isernhagen, J., & Bulkin, N.	To compare and contrast the experiences of two first-time female superintendents. To examine skills of superintendents and how these skills interact with the daily challenges within different school environments and geographic settings.	This qualitative study utilized descriptive analysis and holistic overview of daily journaled experiences of two first-time female superintendents of two mid-western states. Researchers found three common themes: (a) the superintendents' relationship with their school board; (b) their ability to network within the school community; and (c) the school district's willingness to change. These themes are expanded upon to complement each superintendent's skills, circumstances, and challenges.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2014 Beisser, S. R., Peters, R. E., & Thacker, V. M.	To investigate the personal health and wellness of secondary school administrators.	This mixed-methods, exploratory study used an online survey that investigated the work-life balance, health, and nutrition status of secondary administrators. Even though principals shared their zeal for their administrative roles, their comments also suggested they struggled with strategies to balance that with the wellness of their personal lives. The study found there is a gap between knowing what to do about health and wellness and actually doing it. A greater gap was also found among earlier age and career years, where administrators were less able to accomplish. While older administrators were able to manage the stressors and strain of the job through intentional lifestyle and health choices, or from their experiences could find a balance by separating work and self.
2014 Copeland, S. M., & Calhoun, D. W.	To gain information on the perceptions and experiences with mentoring by women superintendents.	This mixed-methods used sequential descriptive statistical analysis of experiences with mentoring by 39 female superintendents in a Southern state. Copeland and Calhoun (2014) found the top three effective elements of mentoring to be school board relations, personnel matters, and budget and finances. In regard to the experiences with mentoring, all had positive and beneficial experiences, specifically the feeling of being supported. One superintendent shared needing advice on self-help, handling emotions, and detached decision-making. Overall the mentoring experiences were positive, superintendents expressed the importance of having a female mentor, and being provided with encouragement and support through both formal and informal mentoring.
2014 Klatt, R.	To examine how gendered expectations and ideal superintendent archetypes shape life quality in the rural superintendency.	This qualitative study used an in-depth case study research design that placed the perspectives of two rural superintendents at the center of the research. Gendered expectations for the male superintendent included: a commitment to long hours, association of physical strength and masculine-oriented sports with strong leadership, and a father-figure, warrior archetype. Expectations for the female superintendent comprised of exercising a collaborative approach, exhibiting healing mother-like qualities, and being perceived as a passive. Two conceptualizations of balance emerge from the data: an integrated view and a compartmentalized view.
2015 Nix, S. J., & Bigham, G.	To examine the skills associated with the duties and roles of the interim superintendent.	This qualitative phenomenological inquiry, examined skills identified in a previous case study by Bigham and Nix (2011). Nix and Bigham (2015) utilized the theoretical framework of Katz's (1955) skills approach: theoretical skills, interpersonal skills, and conceptual skills. The skills associated with the duties and roles of the interim superintendent were analyzed during the reflections between the serving interim (first researcher), the incoming interim, and the second researcher in the Bigham and Nix (2011) original case study. Researchers found five critical skills to make the interim superintendent successful.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2015 Robinson, K.K. & Shakeshaft, C.	To understand why female superintendents leave their positions. To look more closely at what stressors the superintendents' discussed and the relation of these stressors to their health.	This was a secondary study of a qualitative research conducted by Robinson (2013). This study was guided by a research framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) that used data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Using a purposeful sampling method, participants interviewed included 20 women out of 49 who served as superintendents in Virginia. Robinson and Shakeshaft (2015) analyzed the transcripts, memos, and field notes of the original semi-structured interviews. The stories shared by the superintendents in the study found, the job demands had an overall effect on the stress levels, health and well-being of the superintendents. The level of stress was found to be even greater for women working in small, rural school districts.
2015 Tekniepe, R. J.	To further the body of knowledge into the relation of occupational factors that increase the probability of a rural superintendent experiencing an involuntary departure.	This quantitative study used survey data compiled on challenges faced by rural school superintendents and the link between the pressures and involuntary departures. Using logistic regression, Tekniepe (2015) analyzed data from 844 rural superintendents across 48 states about the challenges faced by rural school superintendents and the link between the pressures and involuntary departures. Shared decision-making issues were also found to lead to undue stress. Because of the high demands, stressors, and pressures of the position, superintendents who do not maintain their personal, physical, and emotional wellness, have a higher risk for health-related issues, experience burnout, and eventually leave the district and even the profession of education. Thus, affirming the issue of the need to maintain overall health and wellness.
2016 Palladino, J. M., Haar, J. M., Grady, M., & Perry, K	To better understand the self-sustainability of first-time, female rural superintendents.	This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to explore how eleven women have aspired to and sustained success in their first-time, rural superintendencies. Researchers presented five vignettes, samples about the relationship descriptions shared by the participants. The importance of resiliency among female superintendents anchored the study on discussions of the literature and identified the theoretical perspective of self-efficacy theory (SET) as the framework.
2016 Richards, K. A. R., Levesque- Bristol, C., Templin, T. J., & Graber, K. C.	To evaluate a research-based conceptual model for understanding the relationships among resilience, role stress, and burnout in elementary and secondary teachers.	This quantitative descriptive study of 415 teachers in three Midwestern adjacent school districts utilized a cross-sectional online survey to evaluate a research-based conceptual model for understanding the relationships among resilience, role stress, and burnout. Richards et al., (2016) found teachers across grade levels all experience similar levels of role stress and burnout. As predicted resilience brought about less perceived stress as well as burnout across both groups.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2016 Robinson, K., & Shakeshaft, C.	To conduct a national survey in order to expand on previous research on stress in the superintendency by addressing the link between the superintendents' levels of stress and their health and well-being	In this quantitative study, researchers examined the relationship of stress variables and health outcomes from a survey completed by 1,865 superintendents across the United States. Superintendents reported that the most significant impact of stress was to their physical health, mental health, and spousal relationships. The top three health issues reported were heart attack, anxiety, and heart disease. Reported to cause most on-the-job stressors were changes in federal and state policies, time demands, and a lack of school funding. Other reported stressors included time required by the job, work-life balance, the use of social media for district communication, and participating in after hour activities at the expense of personal time.
2017 Allred, P. D., Maxwell, G. M., & Skrla, L. E.	To reveal aspirations, motivations, needs, and constraints of female South Texas school district superintendents, to better understand how women perceive and experience the social constructions of gender and the superintendency as practicing educational leader.	This qualitative naturalistic case study of seven south Texas, female superintendents was conducted with the researcher-as-instrument using a feminist approach. Emergent themes from this flexible study include perceptions of rural superintendency (five of seven superintendents serve in rural districts) and Hispanic school leadership (four of seven superintendents identified themselves as Hispanic). Allred et al., (2017) contend that attention should be paid to challenges faced by female superintendents, specifically the aspiration (motivation) to leadership among female leaders, the gendered issue of rural school leadership, as women serve rural districts in higher proportions in the superintendency, as well as constraints, need for mentorship, and placement of female leaders within school districts.
2017 Davidson, S., & Butcher, J. T.	To explore rural superintendents' experiences in the application of principle-centered leadership in their school districts.	This study qualitative phenomenological study of 10 rural superintendents in East Texas found it is important to practice principle-centered standards for superintendency effectiveness. The study showed the biggest influence for the participants was family and faith followed by being service oriented. Emerging themes of trustworthiness at the personal level include family and faith, being service oriented, continual learning, leading balanced lives, believing in other people, and building and maintaining trustworthiness. Emerging themes of trust at the interpersonal level include building relationships, building others up, listening, keeping promises and commitments, and modeling by example.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2017 Haecker, B. M., Lane, F.C., & Zientek, L.R.	To explore school district central office administrators' knowledge and beliefs about evidence-based decision making practices.	Through survey methodology and non-probability purposive sampling, this quantitative study identified central office, Texas school district participants, including superintendents. This study found knowledge, self-confidence and beliefs are important predictors of administrators' evidence-based decision-making practices. Districts with existing policies to address the use of research in decision-making appeared more knowledgeable about evidence-based practices. Thus, making district policies important to decision-making. Additionally, this study found, rural superintendents, specifically those in school districts with 500 or fewer students, tended to have lower ratings of their evidence-based practices.
2018 Decman, J. M., Badgett, K., Shaughnessy, B., Randall, A., Nixon, L., & Lemley, B.	To describe the connections between the Educational Leadership Constituents Council (ELCC) standards and leadership practices in relation to school districts and superintendent perceptions on the demands of executive leadership.	This qualitative study conducted individual interviews of 18 Houston, Texas superintendents. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Decman et al., (2017) found the following major themes influencing their fiscal decision-making process(es): a) the importance of communication and the impact of personnel on fiscal decision-making; and b) the impact of personnel and staff on fiscal decision-making in relation to human resources. Major themes in consensus-building skills to involve stakeholders in decision-making were listed. Major themes related to processes that support continuous improvement included effective communication were shared.
2018 Mahfouz, J.	To explore the various stressors school administrators experience and the coping strategies they utilize to manage their stress.	This qualitative study utilized in-depth interviews and shadowing observations to determine administrative stressors and coping strategies. The researcher followed 13 principals of a rural school district in Pennsylvania. Various stressors experienced by principals were found to be related to work with the prevalence of constant change, relationships with the most challenging and stressful related to parents, and time-related stress most specifically dealing with interruptions, lack of work-life balance and self-care and compassion-fatigue. Participants described various emotions such as guilt, fear, disrespect, undervalued. Coping strategies for stress management and navigation of stress during their daily work experience consisted of spending time with loved ones and having an outlet outside work.
2018 Yates, S. & De Jong, D.	To examine the factors that influence the anticipated length of service of the current superintendents in South Dakota.	This quantitative study conducted online survey responses completed by 103 rural superintendents. Qualities found to be essential for success in superintendency included leadership, approachable, and personable. Rewarding aspects of the superintendency included helping students succeed, helping staff achieve their goals, and making decisions. Challenging aspects of the superintendency included lack of family time, meeting budgetary constraints, and navigating politics. Factors that could convince a superintendent to remain included compensation, improved board relations, and workload relief.

Year/ Author(s)	Purpose	Summary
2019 Bell, J.J.	To investigate New York State school superintendent job satisfaction and the potential contributing factors to their job satisfaction in an era of reduced resources and increased accountability.	This quantitative study investigated job satisfaction among New York super-intendents. Researchers utilized a survey methodology completed by 280 superintendents. This study was used as a comparison from a previous survey taken in 2009 and came after many federal and state changes in policies and finances. Factors that most contributed to superintendent job satisfaction included the opportunity to impact students, having substantial input into the direction of the district, and the opportunity to build a team of educators. The lowest ranked included enjoying the status of the job and liking the high visibility of the job. Superintendents reported the following as the top three motivators: making a difference, providing leadership, and moving the district forward.
2019 Lefdal, J., & De Jong, D.	To identify the causes of perceived superintendent stress and to determine how superintendents are learning to cope with this stress.	This is a quantitative study, which surveyed a defined population of superintendents in a rural Midwest state. The researchers used a 30 question survey instrument, completed by 102 respondents, and analyzed by a focus group of five superintendents selected using a convenience sampling. The survey rated factors of perceived superintendent stress, family stress, health-related illnesses, coping methods for reducing stress, and superintendent hobbies. Superintendents reported high self-expectations, evening activities as the top rated job-related duties that caused stress. Role ambiguity and constraints of board policy were perceived as minimal consequence. The open-ended responses revealed an increase in stressors due to budget concerns, federal changes and paperwork, and school board of education concerns or micromanagement.
2019 Jacobs, C.M.	To explore the meaning or essence of the phenomenon of ineffective-leader-induced occupational stress within and outside of the workplace.	This qualitative, phenomenological study included open-ended interviews of nine diverse leaders from a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Special Agent, to a Licensed Practical Nurse, and various managers and executives, to a Firefighter. The study collected followers' perceptions based on their experiences of effective or ineffective leaders resulting in occupational stress. Jacobs (2019) found followers were impacted by ineffective leaders or their needs were not met, which resulted in stress.
2019 Klocko, B. A., Justis, R. J., & Kirby, E. A.	To better understand how superintendents develop grit, resilience, and tenacity while leading an educational enterprise.	This phenomenological qualitative inquiry is a follow up study of a previous quantitative analysis of 173 superintendents with an expanded framework of resilience. In the first phase of their study, Klocko and Kirby (2014) found superintendents rarely expressed their feelings of anxiety or took the time to engage in stress-reducing activities. However, in this phase of the study, Klocko et al. (2019) reported that leadership tenacity is determined by resilience, grit, and superintendents' experiences.

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2019 Waldron, J. J., Alborn- Yilek, S., Gute, G., Schaes, D., & Huckstadt, K.	To use semi-structured interviewing to glean major themes that represent the phenomenological experience of CatchLife participants.	This qualitative, descriptive study conducted semi-structured interviews of 12 Iowa administrators who completed a 6-month well-being intervention program, CatchLife, on the leadership-life balance of school administrators. Each of the participants expressed their passion for their position but in some ways this passion also resulted in stress that oftentimes resulted in poor health behaviors. Respondents shared their awareness of the high levels of stress experienced as superintendents and the need for self-care. The administrators found an increase in physical activity led to a decrease in stress levels and an increase in their well-being. This motivated many to make behavior changes, increased their desire to model wellness for their staff, and to find ways to create a culture of wellness for all.
2019 Williams, H. P., Shoup, K., Durham, L. C., Johnson, B. A., Dunstan, S., Brady, B. A., & Siebert, C. F.	To examine the factors superintendents themselves identify as impacting their decision to stay or leave a school district.	This qualitative study used open-ended narrative interviews of 10 rural superintendents in the State of Idaho. Findings were analyzed using the prospect theory. Reviewing the results of perceived barriers, challenges, opportunities and superintendents' experiences, Williams et al., (2019) found the most significant factors influencing superintendents to stay or leave a school include school boards, personal fulfillment, work-life balance, ability to contribute, community relations and district culture. Examples of work-life balance shared by superintendents included that of the public role in a rural community and its impact on their families.

Note. The research focus of this literature review is on leadership, specifically executive leadership and maintaining personal physical and emotional wellness with rural superintendents as my primary subjects and the tools, skills, and coping mechanisms used that affect their decision-making and job performance.