

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

MINDING THE GAP: BABY BOOMER SUPERINTENDENTS'  
LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT OF MILLENNIAL PRINCIPALS

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

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May 2013

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## Dedication

Confining this dedication to a mere page is an impossible challenge. There are so many whose contributions to my life have led to this point, yet I will attempt to properly recognize them. Most importantly, this dissertation could never have been written without the support and sacrifices of my gorgeous and loving wife, Lisa. She believed in me when I first considered pursuing this degree, and has never been anything other than my most ardent supporter. Along the way she made sure I ate, slept, exercised, and spent time with our 4 beautiful children: Jackson, Siena, Joseph, and Emma. On countless nights Lisa cared for, bathed, and put to bed all of our kids so that I could transcribe, code, write, or read. Lisa worked as hard on this dissertation as I did. Next, I want to thank my parents, Dr. Ken and Helene Greenlinger. There are no words to properly thank them for the opportunities they have given me. They are my biggest fans, and have taught me that a good life can only be attained through hard work and righteous living. They are the models for my professional and family life. Frank and Patti Payfer are the best in-laws a husband could have, and are even better grandparents. They too, helped bear the burden of caring for our children while I attended class every Wednesday and on Saturdays. Along my academic journey, I have had the benefit of some amazing mentors and teachers. Mrs. Diane McEvoy, my 11<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher, was the first teacher who cared enough to help me find my writing voice, even if that voice was not always a serious one. Mr. Steve Totheroh, my 11<sup>th</sup> grade US History teacher, was the reason I became a teacher. He demonstrated how one person could positively influence hundreds of lives through passionate teaching. Jeff Salzman is the consummate leader, and he remains the bar to which I strive to reach. Dr. Susan Sheridan gave me my first classroom experience, and she set me on the path to teaching and research during a bone chilling winter of “Drawing and Writing.” Though Cliff Moore served on this dissertation committee, long before that he gave me the opportunity to be a leader, and has taught me so much through his example of calm and thoughtful problem solving. Brad Benioff showed me that it’s possible to be both an excellent Principal and Dad. Lastly, I wish to thank Jane Mintz for seeing the leader in me, and for being my advocate no matter the situation. There are so many others whose belief in me has contributed to this accomplishment, and I hope that those who have gone unnamed on this page see the completion of this research and degree as a point of pride for them.

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## ABSTRACT

### MINDING THE GAP: BABY BOOMER SUPERINTENDENTS' LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT OF MILLENNIAL PRINCIPALS

By

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Doctor of Education Degree

in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study is to identify the leadership strategies and actions that Superintendents take to support Millennial principals. As the age of California Superintendents increases, the average age of incoming Principals is decreasing. This widening “generation gap” results in a different set of needs for supporting new Principals. This study addresses the leadership practices of Superintendents, focused on goal setting, support, relationships, and autonomy. This study is rooted in the literature concerning leadership and generational differences. Principals indicate that there are practices that lead to high levels of support and success. Superintendents must be aware of the generational differences in their young Principals, so that school systems can adjust to ongoing changes in leadership. This study provides Principals and Superintendents with practices that have led to successful school leadership.

## **Chapter I**

### **Statement of the Problem**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this multiple case study is to examine the leadership actions of successful California superintendents of improving districts as they support millennial principals.

This study is significant given the demographic changes currently taking place in the school principalship. The number of principals born between 1975 and 1985 (hereafter referred to as “millennial”) is growing annually, while the average age of Superintendents remains stagnant (Matthews, 2002; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Suckert, 2008). The support needs for the millennial generation differ from preceding generations in terms of the need for autonomy, trust, and flexibility, and should be recognized by Superintendents wishing to support their newest and youngest leaders (Horn, 2001). Furthermore, emerging instructional technology trends have transitioned from a fringe movement in a limited number of districts to a widely implemented set of classroom tools independent of district size, demographics, or location (Schrum & Levin, 2009).

This study is intended to contribute to the practice of current and aspiring Superintendents. Superintendents remain in a relatively static age group, while an increasing number of young, “millennial” principals are being assigned to lead schools (Matthews, 2002; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Suckert, 2008). The millennial generation has an increased desire to implement new technologies, and requires a different type of support than previous generations (Howe, 2005). This study will

examine how Superintendents maintain district vision and goals while supporting principals' innovation. In particular, this study seeks to identify the specific leadership actions taken by Superintendents that lead to student and school improvement.

### **Problem Statement**

As educational technology becomes more common in schools, the need for supportive leadership from the Superintendent changes. California Superintendents remain largely in a static age group, mostly falling in the later years of the “Baby Boomer” generation (Matthews, 2002). Simultaneously, the average age of new principals is decreasing (Suckert, 2008). The youngest of these principals were born between 1975 and 1985 and are considered the “millennial” generation, and -in order to be successful- require different supports (flexibility, autonomy, access to resources) than their predecessors in order to promote academic improvement through the use of classroom technologies (Harris, 2005; Horn, 2001).

### **Purpose and Significance**

The purpose of this study is to identify the leadership strategies and actions that Superintendents take to support Millennial principals. This study informs the practice of current and aspiring Superintendents who wish to lead principals and schools to success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The findings of this study provide Superintendents with strategies and specific advice regarding the unique support needs of millennial principals, based on the successful actions of established Superintendents currently working with millennial principals.

The significance of this study is rooted in the literature concerning Superintendent leadership. More than any other person, the Superintendent influences the outcomes of a

school system (Herman, et al., 1990). According to the recent body of literature, effective schools research has moved from the classroom, to site leadership, and currently, to the district level (Waters & Marzano, 2007a). This level of leadership impacts student learning so much, that Leithwood (2004) argues it is second only in importance to classroom instruction. In sum, the Superintendent can be the chief influence on student academic success, and thus warrants close examination to determine the actions that can lead to success.

Of all the stakeholders influenced by the Superintendent, the one that has a direct impact on more students than any other is the school principal. Therefore, it is critical to study the impact Superintendents have on principal leadership. Principals in academically improved districts believe that the Superintendent plays a key role in student achievement (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Superintendents support and direct principals toward increased student achievement through specific and intentional goal oriented behaviors (Waters & Marzano, 2007). Considering the increased use of technology in schools and classrooms, as well as the changing demographics of the school principal, Superintendents in successful districts have demonstrated the need to adjust their supportive techniques to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century school leader.

Despite the well-established understanding of Superintendent leadership, there is a need to know how Superintendent leadership is changing with the new generation of principals (Rueter, 2009). By closely examining two Superintendents who have already successfully navigated these changes, this study offers guidelines for the large audience of Superintendents across the country who are currently -or will soon be- facing the same leadership challenges.

## **Research Questions**

In order to identify the strategies and actions of Superintendents who have successfully supported millennial principals, the following research questions will provide the structure for this study:

How do successful Superintendents of academically improving districts support millennial principals who promote teacher use of emerging instructional technologies?

- How do Superintendents promote a connection between instructional technology and the district vision and goals?
- What actions do Superintendents take to support principal efforts to implement classroom technologies?
- How do Superintendents provide principals with “defined autonomy” in regards to implementing technologies?

## **Specialized Terms:**

A number of specialized terms were used during this study. It is important to clarify these terms since many of the terms have multiple or varied definitions. Below is a list of terms that were used, along with the definition or explanation, as they relate to this study.

- a. Successful Superintendent - In this study, we follow 2 “successful Superintendents.” For this study, success is defined by a tenure of at least 6 years. This was chosen as it indicates a Superintendent has been granted multiple contracts, and has remained in his/her position for at least one School Board election.

- b. Academically Improving District – For this study, a school district is considered to be academically improving if it has shown an annual improvement in its district API scores for each year the Superintendent has presided over the district..
- c. Millennial Principals – Though many age ranges can be found to describe the “millennial generation,” this study uses Harris’ (2005) explanation of principals born between 1975 and 1985.
- d. Emerging Technologies – For this study, we examine the implementation of a category of instructional technologies that -for this study- are described as “emerging.” As opposed to desktop computers, which for the most part are present in most classrooms or school campuses across the country, emerging technologies are increasingly prevalent, but are not a mainstay in schools. These devices include (but are not limited to): tablets, interactive whiteboards, student response systems, handheld computing devices, and cell phones
- e. Defined Autonomy - The amount a principal is expected and supported to lead within the “boundaries defined by the district goals” (Waters & Marzano, 2007).

### **Overview of Methodology**

This study used a mixed methods methodology, utilizing interviews of superintendents and principals. In order to glean the meaningful experiences and

perceptions of superintendents and principals, this study relied mostly on qualitative data gathered through interviews.

This study began with interviews of two superintendents. Following these interviews, a second interview instrument was developed to gather the perceptions of the millennial principals who were supported by these superintendents.

Data for this study were collected at two different school districts, which were selected using the following criteria sampling strategy. First districts with a student enrollment of 5,000-25,000 students were identified. Next, districts of those enrollments with increased API performance for at least 6 years were selected. From that list, districts that have had the same superintendent during those 6 years were identified. Lastly, districts with millennial principals were selected as the pool from which this study would draw. Districts in Southern California were selected in order to make the study feasible for the researcher.

Participants for this study include the two superintendents of the districts selected from the criteria above, as well as five of the millennial principals they supervise.

Data were gathered during interviews of the superintendents and principals. The interviews were semi-structured and focus on leadership, technology, and autonomy. The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis of interview transcripts.

### **Limitations**

There are some aspects of this study that are considered limitations. Primarily, this study looks at a relatively small sample of two superintendents and fewer than ten principals. Therefore, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to all superintendents and all principals. Additionally, this study is limited to a time frame of

one school semester, due to the researcher's enrollment in a time bound doctoral program. Finally, the findings and conclusions of case studies cannot necessarily be generalized, as they represent the lived experiences of the participants.

### **Delimitations**

The scope of this study was limited to urban and suburban Southern California districts with enrollments between 5,000 and 25,000 students that showed continuous improvement in their API scores. The study was also limited to Superintendents with at least 6 years of tenure in districts that met the above criteria. The principal participants were limited to those in the millennial generation who are implementing emerging classroom technologies at the time of the study. This study also did not gather data on superintendent support of principals from generations other than the millennial generation.

### **Organization**

This study follows a standard format for qualitative research studies. To begin, this study provides an overview of the problem being studied. This introduction is followed by a review of the relevant literature, in order to provide a foundation of knowledge in the areas being studied. Next, the methods of inquiry will be discussed in order to explain the steps the researcher took to collect and analyze data. The results of those findings will be discussed, framed by the major themes from the literature and the data. Lastly, the researcher provides an interpretation of the findings. This interpretation includes recommendations for current or aspiring Superintendents, along with recommendations for future researchers who wish to broaden the scope of knowledge in this area of research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Review of the Current Literature**

#### **Introduction**

The body of literature regarding leadership is rife with examples of executive leaders from the business world and the impact they've had on their organizations. Jim Collins (2001) alone has provided the stories of scores of CEOs who, on the strength of their leadership, turned mediocre companies into worldwide economic powers. In those examples, the sheer will and vision of these CEOs were the impetus for the success of their companies.

Just as the leadership practices of a CEO impact a company's success, so too does the leadership of a superintendent have an effect on student achievement. According to the recent body of literature, effective schools research has moved from the classroom, to site leadership, and currently, to the district level (Waters & Marzano, 2007). This level of leadership impacts student learning so much, in fact, that Leithwood, et al. (2004) argues it is second only in importance to classroom instruction.

More than any other person, the leadership of the superintendent influences the outcomes of a school system. These outcomes can include overall improvement of standardized test scores, organizational goals, or goals based on district vision or mission statements. The superintendent influences these outcomes through the use of various leadership strategies including goal setting, mentoring, and effective management of resources (Adams, 1987; Burnett, 1989; Clore, 1991; Hart & Ogawa, 1987; Herman, Center for Research on Evaluation, & et al., 1990; Morgan, 1990; Vaughan, 2002). The idea that the Superintendent has an influence on student outcomes is in stark contrast to

other beliefs. First, Leithwood (1995) suggests that the farther the leader is from the ground level work, the more variables there are that can counteract or embellish the impact of the superintendent. These variables can be the diffusion of the superintendent's message or the effective leadership of middle managers, such as principals. Secondly, superintendents must contend with the overwhelming public view that characterizes superintendents as part of the "blob" of educators who work far from the classroom (Bennett, Finn, & Cribb, 1999; Waters, 2007). Lastly, Superintendents must also combat the pressures of politics and accountability, which most often drive superintendents out of the field of education (Johnson, 2002).

It is noted that since the "era of accountability" began, districts vary in the manner and degree to which they seek to improve student learning outcomes (Fuhrman & Elmore, 1990). Despite the variations in specific instructional and organizational actions, researchers have identified general leadership policies or actions that lead to increased student achievement (Togneri, Anderson, & Learning First Alliance, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2007). These practices have been identified in districts of all sizes, locations, and socio-economic makeup, and can therefore be considered universally successful leadership practices. These practices include effective instructional leadership, providing a safe learning environment, a clear mission for the school, and the use of effective instructional practices (Adams, 1987; Barth, 1990; Burbach & Butler, 2005; Burnett, 1989).

Superintendents provide leadership to many stakeholder groups (i.e. school board, district management, site administrators, teachers, parents, students, community). These relationships are built over time, which leads to the positive correlation of superintendent

tenure to student success (Adams, 1987; Burnett, 1989; Clore, 1991; Jacksin, 1991; and Waters & Marzano, 2007). Of all the stakeholder groups influenced by the superintendent, the one that has a direct impact on more students than any other is the collection of school principals. Therefore, it is critical to study the impact superintendents have on principal leadership. Principals in improved districts believe that the superintendent plays a key role in student achievement (Leithwood, et al., 2004). Superintendents support and direct principals toward increased student achievement through specific and intentional goal oriented behaviors (Waters & Marzano, 2007). In his study of superintendents and principals in New York City, Lee (2005) found that superintendents rely on principals to achieve district goals just as principals rely on the superintendent in order to reach school site goals.

Of the many superintendent leadership practices, one practice that is gaining attention in the literature is labeled “defined autonomy.” Superintendents who employ defined autonomy provide “non-negotiable goals for learning and instruction, yet provide school leadership teams with the responsibility and authority for determining how to meet those goals” (Waters & Marzano, 2007, p. 13; Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007). Stated another way, defined autonomy includes the expectation and support for principals to lead within the boundaries of district instructional goals. This type of leadership necessitates two separate skills on the part of the superintendent. Primarily, the superintendent must set clearly defined, shared goals for student learning. Once these goals are set, the superintendent must monitor and support the school sites, while allowing for the site leader to take responsibility for the progress of the school. In their study of principal autonomy, Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna (2007) found that the

level of a principal's autonomy differed across the three states studied. However, a common perception among principals was that their level of autonomy was impeded by district politics, school funding, and strict accountability systems. The Adamowski study found that most principals learn to "work the system" to accomplish their goals (p. 32). Finally, this study underlined the importance of strong district leadership and positive relationships between principals and the superintendent, in order to allow principals to "fully exercise leadership" (p. 33).

A new variable that has become increasingly important in the study of superintendent leadership is centered on the growing differential between superintendent and principal age. As California Superintendents remain in the Baby Boomer generation, principals are increasingly growing younger as a group. The newest principals, members of the millennial generation, have vastly different needs in regards to supervision and support. The millennial-specific needs include trust, autonomy, and flexibility (Emeagwali, 2011; Howe, 2005). In order to support student success, superintendents must not only recognize the changing needs of principals, but must also change the way they interact and support their newest leaders.

With younger, tech-savvy principals, an increase in instructional technologies has also emerged. As "digital natives," millennial principals are more comfortable with new technologies, because they have always lived in a digital world (Prensky, 2001). The baby boomer generation is considered by Prensky (2001) to be a group of "digital immigrants," who are slower to learn and adapt technologies in their daily lives. Many of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century technologies currently being implemented are foreign to older school leaders, so the task of supporting principals as they implement technologies in their

schools has become a new and significant challenge. Some superintendents can rely on a district level administrator to oversee technology purchasing and support (S. Carr, personal communication, October 29, 2011).

The role of the superintendent, though greatly altered in recent years, remains a position of leadership and support for principals. If the superintendent has a significant impact on student achievement, and if research can point to particular behaviors or skills that can be practiced by superintendents, it stands to reason that further research in this arena can have a positive influence on a large number of students.

### **Superintendent Leadership Practices**

To date, there have been numerous studies that explored the leadership role of the superintendent (Farkas, et al., 2001; Lee, 2005; Patterson, 2001). Though these studies range in scope and focus, they create a body of knowledge that has impacted the role of the superintendent by focusing on the leadership practices needed to run a successful school district. To that point, Leithwood (2004) concluded that leadership is second only to teaching among the school influences on student success. Patterson (2001) concurred when he concluded that measurable progress for students is dependent on the leadership skills of the superintendent. In their study of the influence of district leadership, Marzano and Waters (2007) uncovered 5 significant practices that lead to student achievement. Of these practices, four relate to the work of the Superintendent and school level administrators. These practices are interdependent, and cannot stand alone to impact student achievement. The practices are: the goal setting process, non-negotiable goals for student achievement, monitoring of progress toward the goals, and support for school sites to achieve the goals.

### **Goal setting process.**

First, superintendents have to lead the goal setting process. The superintendent takes responsibility for ensuring useful data are available and that district and site administrators can make meaningful conclusions from the data. A successful set of goals must be generated through a collaborative approach, allowing members of the organization to feel a sense of ownership over the future. These goals typically lead to a vision that will be a “unique and ideal image of the future” for the district (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The goals and vision must be focused and coherent, lest they be too broad to manage (Olson, 2007). The goals must create a vision for student achievement (Togneri, 2003). When members of the group share a connection to the vision, there is a “focus and energy for learning” (Senge, 2006). When a leader sets out on the goal setting process, he must ensure that all possible viewpoints are represented. All members of the organization must be either present or represented, lest the vision appear to be anything other than a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

### **Non-negotiable goals.**

During the goal setting process, the superintendent must lead the district toward instructional and achievement goals for the district as a whole, for individual schools, and for particular populations of students. These goals must be clear and non-negotiable so that they clearly convey that improved student achievement is the priority of the district (Aplin & Daresh, 1984). Forming these goals is seen as an essential step districts must take in order to be successful (Bottoms, Schmidt-Davis, & Southern Regional Education, 2010). Peterson (1998) demonstrated that effective superintendents set high goals based on the idea that all children can learn. Herman (1990) adds that the goals are reflected

not just by the goal statements, but are integrated into the district's overall vision. Furthermore, superintendents expect principals to incorporate these goals into their own goal setting processes at the building level. Aplin and Daresh (1984) refer to this as a screen through which all school level decisions are made.

What makes these goals valuable to the organization, though, is the fact that they are non-negotiable. The superintendent, school board, site administrators, and teachers adopt these goals. They inform all large-scale policies, while also influencing smaller instructional decisions made at the school site. A key to these goals being non-negotiable is that principals implicitly support the goals, doing nothing to subvert them at the school site (Burbach & Butler, 2005; Roelle, 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2007).

#### **Goal monitoring.**

An effective superintendent not only has the ability to clarify a vision, but also has the skills to set a strategy for achieving the vision through clear goals. Stated differently, a "vision without strategy is an illusion" (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Once clear, non-negotiable goals have been identified, it is up to the superintendent to communicate the goals and, more importantly, ensure they are being met. In his study of New York principals and superintendents, Lee (2005) found that superintendents need principals to achieve district goals, and that it takes superintendent leadership to empower principals to achieve lofty goals. Roelle (2010) asserts that superintendents must create an environment that allows principals to practice their own leadership, which includes goal development.

Principals are not the only important stakeholder group when it comes to accomplishing district instructional goals. Deming (1986) instructs leaders to rely on

everybody in the organization to accomplish the vision. Every member, from top to bottom, must contribute to the goals by exemplifying the shared values upon which the goals are based. This points to the need for superintendents to monitor -through formal and informal contact- principal actions and the degree to which site leaders are explicitly working toward the non-negotiable goals (Boris-Schachter, 1999).

Superintendents can monitor goal progress in many ways. By being highly visible, superintendents communicate to stakeholders that the goals are more than slogans. By being personally involved in instructional matters, superintendents can communicate the responsibility they assume for achieving goals (Hentschke, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2009).

Having useful data available also increases a superintendent's ability to gauge student progress in a particular area, or to measure progress of a subgroup of students (Hentschke, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2009). Even though district leaders recognize that rewarding teachers is difficult to adequately accomplish, Superintendents can reward effective teachers and principals whose work supports district goals with public praise and increased autonomy (Farkas, et al, 2001). In sum, the superintendent is responsible for using local, state, and federal measures to monitor goal progress publicly and within the organization.

### **Uses resources to support goals**

Superintendents of successful school districts ensure that resources of all types are directed toward the achievement of the district's non-negotiable goals (Waters & Marzano, 2007). School leaders overwhelmingly agree that effective and efficient budgeting of resources is essential to leadership success, yet remains one of a school

leader's most significant concerns. The resources to be considered include funding, personnel, equipment, materials, and schedules (Farkas, et al., 2001).

Bottoms, et al. (2010) suggest superintendents organize personnel at the district office so that they can best support school sites' goal directed actions. This allows superintendents to foster an organization and environment where principals have the financial and human resources necessary to practice their own leadership (Roelle, 2010). Of utmost importance is a district's ability to provide access to professional growth opportunities for all teachers and principals (Waters & Marzano, 2007). In fact, Leithwood (2004) found that districts that actively supported principal learning were among the most successful in terms of increased student achievement. This indicates that resources are allocated based on need and not dispersed equally among school sites. This further suggests that districts with broad and diverse needs find success when the areas of greatest need have increased access to resources (Bottoms, et al., 2010). By providing adequate resources (i.e. budget, personnel, curriculum, professional development), superintendents empower principals to overcome great adversity and accomplish lofty goals (Lee, 2005).

Learning improvements also require school leaders to have sufficient discretion over site resources to make goal-oriented decisions (Knapp, et al., 2006). There is an increasing call for school site leaders to have greater influence over their school staffing and budget allocations, similar to conditions before 1975, when collective bargaining began. Aside from the inability to remove ineffective teachers, principals identify resource allocation as the area in which they have the least oversight (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007). Researchers are taking an increased look at the area of

school resource oversight, and initial results indicate that district leadership must support schools as they budget and allocate resources to site-specific goals (Bottoms, et al., 2010). By providing not just resources, but also training, oversight, and support for school leaders, superintendents can ensure that schools have the chance to meet the unique, changing, and demanding needs of their students.

### **Principal Autonomy**

With all of the research pointing to an increase in principal autonomy, it is important to recognize that complete principal freedom is not conducive to success. Barth (1990) argues that principals are the key change agents in schools. Burbach and Butler (2005) found that autonomy was one of three key elements to principal success. However, an emerging topic of study is the balance between oversight and autonomy. Two large studies have recently highlighted the issue of autonomy for school site leaders. Adamowski, Cavanna, and Therriault (2007) defined the “autonomy gap” as the perceived lack of autonomy school principals reported. Principals were asked to compare the level of autonomy they feel they need to be effective and the level of autonomy they actually have. The research measured perceived and actual autonomy in 21 key areas of school leadership. The “gap” was the difference between the perceived importance of a particular school function (i.e. hiring and firing of teachers, pacing of instructional calendar) and the autonomy the principal actually had for that function. The unfortunate conclusion drawn in this study is that highly effective and motivated leaders settle for limited decision making powers, learning to operate within a constrained environment. However, this study also indicated that principals learn to work within the system, and

find creative ways to make the system work in their favor. This crafty leadership allows principals to regularly achieve first order change.

**Defined autonomy.**

The second large-scale study that addressed defined autonomy was Marzano and Waters' (2007) meta-analysis focused on superintendent leadership. In their work, effective superintendents had principals participate in shared goal setting, echoing the findings of other researchers (Burbach & Butler, 2005; Roelle, 2010). Following the goal setting, superintendents monitored school progress toward these goals, but empowered the site leadership to take responsibility for the success of the school. This concept has been coined "defined autonomy," and represents an emerging topic of study of significant potential impact on schools. It is important to note the defined autonomy is not the equivalent of "site-based management," (SBM) which has overwhelmingly been overturned as a successful leadership strategy (David, 1995).

Since its introduction to the education mainstream, SBM has had as many definitions as it has had practitioners (David, 1995). The variability of definitions has led to a lack of coherent strategies and practices for leadership success. Overall, SBM encourages near complete oversight of school operations be given to the principal and site staff. This may allow schools to attain site goals, but is not conducive to achieving district or specific student population goals. SBM reduces the role of the superintendent in regards to individual school improvement, which contradicts the identified need for superintendent involvement in school goal setting and progress monitoring (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

Defined autonomy differs from SBM because superintendents who facilitate defined autonomy take into account Marzano and Waters' (2007) district-level leadership practices (4 of which are described above). When a superintendent includes school leaders in defining non-negotiable goals, and then commits resources to supporting school leaders in their efforts to attain these goals, he is building a relationship with the schools. This relationship creates mutual expectations and commitments to shared goals. A balance is struck between district-level expectations and site autonomy to solve problems and increase student achievement (Bottoms, et al., 2010). There is also a striking similarity between the role of principal and superintendent in terms of leadership practices- especially in the area of curriculum and instruction (Rueter, 2009).

### **Role of the Principal**

A significant amount of research has been conducted regarding the role and importance of the school principal. Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005) concluded that principal leadership has a discernible –though indirect- impact on student achievement, while Barth (1990) identified the principal as the key change agent for school improvement. Similarly, Evans (1996, p.202) called Principals “indispensable to innovation.” According to Leithwood et al. (2004), leadership is second only to teacher effectiveness among the school influences on student learning. The role of the principal is also connected to school improvement and reforms (Ford & Bennett, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). As Kelley & Peterson (2006) point out, the work of the school principal is always evolving and seldom understood. Current trends include accountability pressures from No Child Left Behind and budget constraints due to economic recession. To effectively manage the school, support students and teachers, and champion

innovation, the school principal requires a great deal of support from the Superintendent. This support comes in many forms, including access to budget and personnel resources, as well as encouragement and empowerment (Roelle, 2010).

### **Superintendent Support of Principals**

Current research indicates that the leadership skills of the superintendent impact the quality of the learning environment as well as student outcomes (Patterson, 2001; Schlechty, 2000). In order for the principal to provide a quality learning environment to students, the Superintendent must provide the principal with working conditions that are conducive to successful school leadership. Superintendents must foster an environment where principals have the resources and staffing necessary to put their own leadership in to practice (Roelle, 2010). Burbach & Butler (2005) contend that the level of support needed for principals is directly traced to the superintendent, which underscores how critical superintendent leadership is.

Other researchers have examined the symbiotic relationship shared by principals and superintendents. After studying principals and district leaders in New York City, Lee (2005) concluded that neither could reach their goals without relying on each other. Lee also concluded that Superintendents could empower principals to innovate and make significant improvements to schools. Roelle (2010) found that principals could reach their school goals when the superintendent fostered an environment where principals were free to practice their own leadership.

### **Generational Differences**

A key aspect that separates this research from previous studies of superintendent support of principals is the generational differences that have become increasingly

relevant to school and district leadership. Lancaster & Stillman (2002) noted that this is the first era in history where four distinct generations are concurrently in the work force. These four generations: The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials all have distinct characteristics when it comes to work habits and desired supports for the work place. This study will not look at all four generations; the focus will be upon Baby Boomer superintendents and Millennial principals.

### **Baby boomer generation.**

Born following World War II and into the early 1960's, the Baby Boomer Generation has become known for both its size and its deviance from previous generations. Baby Boomers make up the largest part of the U.S. population and work force (Harris, 2005). Baby Boomers are defined by their experiences that include the JFK assassination, the Vietnam War, the Counter Culture, the Civil Rights movement, the Cold War, and the space race.

Baby Boomers are known to value optimism, hard work, involvement, and personal wellness. Boomers also have a 'love-hate' relationship with authority. This means that Baby Boomers show deference to authority structures when they are wielding the authority, while they spurn authority when they are expected to yield to another's authority. This last observation most certainly has an effect on the work place (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Baby Boomers are fiercely independent and are not known for valuing teamwork as much as later generations (Harris, 2005).

### **Millennial generation.**

The most recent generation to enter the work force is the Millennial generation, which-when mentioned in this study- was born between 1975 and 1985. This generation

is known for being born during a time of great technological innovation. This generation has experienced the growth of mobile technologies, ubiquitous connection to the Internet, social networking, the World Trade Center attacks, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Millennials value group consensus, flexibility, innovation, and achievement (Emeagwali, 2011). Additionally, Millennials have an aptitude for technology, a need for structure, and conventional, low risk life goals (Howe, 2005). Millennials can learn multiple skills simultaneously, and seek a balance between work and personal interests (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Millennials are known for having confidence in their own abilities, while also valuing teamwork and interdependence.

### **Current Trends in School Leadership Ages**

In the year 2000, the median age of school superintendents was 52.5 years (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). A 2002 study found that 16% of school superintendents were age 60 or older, and were continuing a trend of aging among superintendents (Mathews, 2002). By 2006, the median age of superintendents had grown to nearly 55 years of age (Glass et al., 2007). As of 2011, the median age of California Superintendents is 56 years old (CA Department of Education, 2011).

It is clear that the average age of the superintendent is steadily increasing. Concomitantly, the median age of the school principal is decreasing. In his study of Minnesota school administrators, Suckert (2008) concluded that millennials will be entering school administration in increasing numbers. Even as early as 2001, researchers determined that incoming school site administrators would have a different vision, passion, and acuity for technology than their Baby Boomer supervisors in the district

office (Horn, 2001). As the age gap between superintendents and principals widens, so too will the gap in expectations, practices, and beliefs (Emeagwali, 2011).

### **Emerging Classroom Technologies**

K-12 education is currently experiencing a boom in technology innovation. These new technologies center on teachers' and students' abilities to collaborate, create, and connect (Schrum & Levin, 2009). While some of the technologies are based on the purchase of capital items that allow interaction with an increased amount of available content, many of the technologies are service based and provide students with opportunities to collaborate. No matter the technology being implemented, a shift in understanding of the instructional process is required for successful student outcomes (Prensky, 2001). At the same time, a shift in district support of new instructional practices is required for successful implementation. For this study, emerging technologies are those that are recognized for their value in improving educational outcomes, but are still without major research to confirm their value (Schrum & Levin, 2009).

#### **Interactive whiteboards.**

One classroom tool that is rapidly being deployed in schools is the interactive whiteboard (Schrum & Levin, 2009), which typically combines a projector with software and computer technology to produce large, interactive images and text for the purposes of teaching and learning . Although these devices are based on the traditional chalk and dry erase boards, teachers and students can create digital content that can be manipulated by touch. Students can move items or text, which provides a kinesthetic aspect to learning, in addition to the verbal and visual paths currently in use. Teachers report that interactive whiteboards are a useful instructional tool (Smith, et al., 2005). Implementation of

interactive whiteboards requires capital investment, along with coordination of facilities staff for the installation of these devices. While interactive whiteboards are becoming more prevalent in schools, they are still considered by researchers to be novel (Morgan, 2010).

### **Tablet computers and netbooks.**

Until recently, small laptop computers were extremely expensive and rarely used in the school setting (Schrum & Levin, 2009). However, two new devices are making their way into classrooms and into the hands of students. These devices, tablet computers and netbooks, offer students an easy and engaging way to access content. Netbooks are small, light weight, low cost laptops that are intended for Internet access and light use for educational software and office tasks (Descy, 2009; Schrum & Levin, 2009). These devices are inexpensive compared to desktops or full sized laptops, and have become popular in 1:1 programs, where every student is assigned a laptop or netbook to bring from home to school (Weston & Bain, 2010).

Like netbooks, tablets are small, lightweight and making their way into K-12 classrooms as a way to engage and connect students. Tablet computers have been defined as a laptop computer with a touch screen and stylus that enables the user to manipulate the screen. Some tablets are without a physical keyboard, only allowing users to type using a virtual keyboard that appears on the screen when the user wants to type (Galligan, et al., 2010). The most recognizable tablet is Apple's iPad, which has become both a commercial and educational best seller.

Challenges associated with the implementation of tablets and netbooks include initial capital investment, having adequate support personnel to service the devices, and

providing sufficient bandwidth to allow an increase in Internet users at the same location. Additionally, Murray and Olcese (2011) indicate that educators have a great deal of work to do before tablets become a reliable classroom tool.

### **Student response devices.**

Also known colloquially as “clickers,” student response devices are handheld electronic devices that allow a classroom of students to simultaneously respond to questions posed by the teacher (or displayed on an interactive whiteboard). Software accompanies these devices that allows the teacher to track individual responses and monitor the understanding of the class as a whole (Schrum & Levin, 2009). Student responses can direct the teacher to use particular interventions during instruction (Hoffman & Goodwin, 2006). Clickers can also be used to quickly analyze student responses on summative assessments, providing timely feedback to students, teachers and parents. Documented barriers to implementing these devices include a costly capital investment and the perception that clickers simplify potentially complex questions and answers.

### **Bring your own device.**

Among the newest trends in educational technology is the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) movement. Schools that practice BYOD allow students to bring their cell phones, tablets, laptops, and other devices for use in the classroom. This practice has gained traction due to trimmed budgets; schools that allow BYOD need to provide devices only to students who do not or cannot bring their own devices. While this new idea has sparked a great deal of conversation on its value, little academic research has been conducted to affirm any benefits (Devaney, 2011).

## **Technology Implementation**

When a principal undertakes any innovation, a close relationship must be maintained with district leadership (Glatthorn, 2000) to ensure success. Implementing an emerging technology is a particularly challenging innovation, particularly for millennial principals working under Baby Boomer Superintendents. This is found to be true when one considers the generational outlooks on risk taking (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Though new technologies are often tested through pilot programs -where small amounts of the new technology is purchased for testing on a small scale- an initial capital investment is made to try the new technology. If principals are not given the freedom to take risks, new strategies -including new technologies- will not be tried and tested in classroom settings (Lee, 2005; Roelle, 2010).

Another aspect of technology implementation that must be considered is the willingness of the Superintendent to grant the principal flexibility on schedules and budgets to allow proper implementation of the new technology (Schrum & Levin, 2009). Since new technologies can change the needs of the classroom, principals must be granted permission to make changes on their campus that will allow the implementation to occur with fidelity. As Fullan (2001) notes, leaders must provide the capacity to incorporate new ideas and practices.

Today's youngest K-12 leaders differ from their predecessors in many ways. One of the most significant differences is the degree to which technology is used to accomplish daily tasks. Marc Prensky (2001) refers to this youngest set as "digital natives," those who instinctively rely on technology throughout the day and on a daily

basis. Older generations, more likely to show reluctance when presented with new technologies, as referred to as “digital immigrants.”

Understanding change is one of the key skills needed to be an effective leader (Fullan, 2001). Given the ubiquitous availability of technology, school leaders are tasked with assimilating new technologies into the school setting. The inclusion of many new technologies, collectively referred to in this study as “emerging technologies”, is a key focal point for millennial principals. In fact, Horn (2001) predicted that millennial principals would need to be seen as “technology wizards” on their school sites (p. 7). In California in particular, this prediction has been made even more real due to the overall cuts in support personnel in school districts that might otherwise serve as technology resources on school campuses.

Although Superintendents are increasingly using technology to accomplish some of their duties, knowledge of instructional technologies continues to be limited (Kelly, 2009; Pardini, 2007). Limited experience with emerging classroom technologies contributes to the generational gap between Baby Boomer superintendents and Millennial principals.

### **Summary**

In an age of increased oversight for schools, school and district leaders must remain innovative and goal oriented. The challenge for district leaders is to set appropriate goals for student achievement, while properly supporting and monitoring the schools’ progress toward these goals. A superintendent must walk the fine line between being domineering and disconnected.

Superintendents improve the likelihood of increased student achievement by leading district and site leaders through collaborative goal setting. Once the goals are determined, they become non-negotiable for all sites. The goals can include site specific or student population specific targets. In order to give efficacy to the goals, superintendents must actively monitor schools' progress toward goals through active inquiry and physical presence at school sites. When goals or benchmarks are not being met, the superintendent must hold the site leader accountable, and provide training or resources to support goal attainment. District resources must be aligned with the non-negotiable goals as the focus of allocation, and should be spread across school sites depending on need. Clear goals and clear boundaries must be given to site leaders in order for student achievement to improve. Clear goals, alone, though do not make a school system successful. It is incumbent upon the superintendent to structure the district office so that support of student learning goals is the main function of the central office.

By following these steps, superintendents encourage collaborative goals, while maintaining clear expectations and an openness for principal decision-making. This balance provides a level of support and autonomy that, taken together, lead to increased student success.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership strategies and actions that Baby Boomer superintendents take when supporting millennial principals who seek to implement emerging instructional technologies in classrooms. This study focused on academically improving districts; those whose API scores have increased since the hiring of the studied superintendent.

This study is significant because an increasing number of millennials are becoming principals, while the average age of superintendents remains within the late Baby Boomer generation (CA Dept. of Education, 2011; Suckert, 2008; Mathews, 2002; Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000). Put another way, principals are getting younger while the superintendents that supervise them are getting older. Furthermore, emerging instructional technology trends have transitioned from a fringe movement in a limited number of districts to a widely-implemented set of classroom tools independent of district size or location. With the widening of this leadership generation gap and influx of new technologies, district leaders require new strategies to effectively support leaders at the school site (Howe, 2005).

The following research questions will guide this study:

How do successful Superintendents of academically improving districts support millennial principals who promote teacher use of emerging instructional technologies?

- How do Superintendents promote a connection between instructional technology and the district vision and goals?

- What actions do Superintendents take to support principal efforts to implement classroom technologies?
- How do Superintendents provide principals with “defined autonomy” in regards to implementing technologies?

### **Chapter Organization**

This chapter will begin with an overview of the research design and tradition from which this study derives. I will then describe the setting and context of the study. Following that will be an explanation of the research sample and data sources. The data gathering instruments and procedures for collecting data will then be discussed. Next, the methods used to analyze the data will be explained, as well as the role of the researcher in this study, including biases. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the sections described above.

### **Research Design**

This study sought to understand the actions superintendents take to support millennial principals. Since this study focused on finding meaning from these interactions between a variety of superintendents and principals, this was a multiple site case study. According to Merriam (2009), a case study looks at a person, event, or process. Moreover, the unit of study is bounded to clearly delineate what will and will not be studied (Merriam, 2009). The particular groups defined in this study are bounded by a number of factors, including their role in the school district, as well as their generation. These sampling characteristics make this a case study (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, this study can be classified as a case study because the researcher looked in depth at the relationship between successful superintendents and millennial principals.

## **Research Tradition**

This study aimed to find meaning and commonalities in the relationships of successful superintendents and millennial principals. Because it aimed to identify themes and meanings through the lived experiences of principals and superintendents, this study can be classified as a phenomenological study (Schram, 2006).

Phenomenological studies have basic assumptions that researchers must make when framing a study and collecting data. Primarily, phenomenology assumes that human actions can only be understood through the lens of the relationships held by the people being studied. Furthermore, phenomenology is based on the idea that one can find meaning in actions and events by understanding the perceptions of the people being studied. In this study, I seek to understand the perceptions of superintendents and millennial principals.

One of the orienting concepts of this research tradition is the suspension of assumptions, or epoche, during data collection. According to Creswell (1996), epoche requires the researcher to rely solely on what is observed; ignoring predispositions or beliefs held prior to data collection. This suspension allows the researcher to find the “essence” of the phenomenon being studied, in this case the leadership strategies and supportive actions take by superintendents in relation to millennial principals (Creswell, 1996). This suspension of bias will be critical when the role of the researcher is considered below.

## **Research Setting and Context**

The data for this study were collected in two school districts. The districts were selected using the following criteria sampling strategy. First, districts with a student

enrollment of 5,000-25,000 students were identified. Next, districts with increased API performance for at least 6 years were selected. From that list, districts that have had the same superintendent during those 6 years were identified. Lastly, districts with millennial principals were selected as the pool from which this study would draw. Districts in Southern California were selected in order to make the study feasible for the researcher.

The sites that were selected varied in size, location, and demographics. This variation is intentional in order to provide findings that are representative of districts of similar sizes, regardless of location.

Because this study follows the phenomenological tradition, the lived experiences of the participants are the foundation of the study's findings (Creswell, 1996). By offering varied points of view from different districts, the findings aim to give a broad view of superintendent leadership related to millennial principals.

At the time of data collection, the researcher had no formal or informal connections to the sites or participants. Therefore, my role at these sites was limited to that of researcher and elementary principal in another district. The practice of epoche allowed the researcher to maintain a neutral, third party role during data collection.

## **Research Sample and Data Sources**

### **Sample selection.**

Data for this study were collected in two Southern California school districts. The multiple case sample was selected based on a combination of criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An initial consideration was that the sample is restricted to Southern California in order to make this study feasible for the researcher (Miles & Huberman,

1994). For this study, the superintendents oversee districts that range in enrollment from 5,000 to 25,000 students. This size ensures that superintendents have direct supervision and more frequent contact with principals, compared to districts of larger enrollment, where a layer of administration often exists between the superintendent and principals, which could dilute the direct impact of superintendents on principals. The absence of this layer is critical to the phenomenon being studied; the leadership actions taken by superintendents as they support principals. The superintendents also oversee districts that show a steady increase in student achievement, according to overall district API scores.

Since the focus of this study is the superintendency, there were additional criteria used to select participants. The superintendents to be studied will have tenure in their current role of at least 6 years. This tenure is meaningful because it indicates the superintendent has renewed his or her contract over the course of at least one School Board election. According to Waters & Marzano (2007), a superintendent's tenure has an effect on student achievement; therefore the criteria used to select participants can be considered valid for the purposes of this study.

An additional sampling criterion was used to select superintendents meeting the above criteria. To be in this study, superintendents were required to have oversight of at least one principal from the millennial generation who was currently implementing emerging classroom technologies at their school site at the time of data collection.

The steps taken to select participants led to three successful superintendents of academically improving districts with millennial principals who are implementing classroom technologies. Unfortunately, as the data collection began, one of the Superintendents announced his retirement and moved far from the location of the study.

Data were collected from the two participating districts primarily through interviews of the superintendents being studied, as well as the millennial principals they support.

Table 1. District and Superintendent Data- Enrollment, Tenure, API Growth

<b>District</b>	<b>ADA for SY 2011-2012</b>	<b>Sup. Tenure</b>	<b>Earliest API During Tenure (Year)</b>	<b>API for SY 2011-2012</b>	<b>API Growth</b>
A	17,429	12 years	708 (2002)	814	106
B	8,122	10 years	645 (2002)	733	88
Statewide	4,664,264	N/A	709 (2005)	778	69

A number of ethical issues could have arisen during the course of this study. As the primary researcher, it was my obligation to maintain positive field relations (Glesne, 2011). First, the researcher had a duty to maintain the anonymity of the participants. This may be difficult, as this study aimed to gather data from successful superintendents from a limited geographical area. The researcher intended for anonymity through the use of aliases and general descriptions of the districts being studied (i.e. SA, DAPB, etc.). Furthermore, the researcher interviewed principals about their direct supervisor, so it was the researcher's duty to –as much as possible- obfuscate the identity of the principals as well. Being a principal should have helped allay the possible hesitations participants may

have had. Throughout the data collection and analysis, the researcher maintained the aliases and protected the identity of the participants of this research, even after the publication of this study.

To further protect the rights of my participants, this study fully conformed to the California State University, Northridge Institutional Review Board processes.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Two instruments were used to gather data that helped identify and explain the leadership actions of superintendents working to support millennial principals. These instruments were designed to gain the perspectives of participants in relation to the research questions. The two instruments were superintendent interviews and principal interviews.

#### **Interviews.**

The researcher began by conducting structured interviews with the superintendent participants (APPENDIX B). Questions started by soliciting the overall leadership structure of the district, including the development of district goals. Questions focused on Marzano and Waters' (2007) findings regarding goal setting. Since the focus of this study was on superintendent actions aimed toward principals, the questions connected to principal support and eventually narrowed toward supporting millennial principals. Questions regarding millennial principals reflect the generational needs outlined in the literature (Howe, 2005; Strauss, 2005; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Interviews with superintendents provided a foundation for the instruments that followed for principal interviews.

Following each superintendent interview, semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals from that district (APPENDIX C). The principal interviews began with general questions regarding leadership structures and supports, moving toward specificity regarding direct superintendent support of technology implementation. Though the principal interviews were similar from district to district, there was variance based on the responses from the superintendents. The variances were the structures or procedures that are unique to different districts. The principal interviews were semi-structured to allow me to probe for specificity regarding their perceptions of their superintendent's leadership practices. Allowing for unanticipated questions also provided an opportunity to uncover individual perspectives that a purely structured interview might not have revealed.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study were collected in two ways. The first method was structured interviews with superintendents who supervise millennial principals. The procedure that follows was interviews with the millennial principals.

#### **Superintendent interviews.**

Superintendent participants were selected based on a multi-criterion method. Interviews with the selected superintendents were scheduled for an hour and a half, and took place in an agreed upon location; the office of the participant. Before proceeding with the interview, the researcher reviewed the participant's rights to end the interview or skip questions should the questions make them uncomfortable. I also reminded the participants that they were to receive a transcript of the interview so that they could verify my recordings and initial observations of body language and tone. This also

allowed the participants to request the removal of any data they no longer wanted to have as part of the study.

### **Principal interviews.**

Following the interview of each superintendent, interviews were scheduled with the millennial principals they supervise. Similar procedures were followed in regards to reviewing the rights of the participant and transcript verification. The principal interviews also took place in the office of the participants, though a neutral site was offered.

### **Timeline.**

Data collection began in the summer of 2012. This allowed better access to superintendents and principals, and the timing made principals and superintendents more amenable to taking the time to participate in this study. All data were collected prior to the end of January, 2013.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this study reflected the thematic analysis associated with the social sciences. Thematic analysis involves coding data and categorizing those codes into themes for further analysis and description (Glesne, 2011). Data analysis is most effective when the researcher has a plan for how he will manage and make sense of the volumes of data sure to be collected. A plan for data analysis should include preliminary analysis, organization for ongoing reflection, and procedures that will be followed for the duration of data collection and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In order to understand the experiences and perceptions of principals and superintendents, great care

was taken to ensure that data analysis accurately reflects the intended meaning of the participants.

### **Preliminary data analysis.**

Because interviews with principals were based on the data gathered during interviews with superintendents, data analysis began immediately and continued through all steps of data collection. According to Glesne (2011), a researcher can be better focused on the direction of the study when data analysis is done simultaneously with data collection. Preliminary data analysis was in the form of memos directly following interviews. Because these interviews took place during the researcher's work week, recording initial thoughts or questions without delay increased the likelihood that these thoughts could be used to focus and direct data analysis, lest they be lost from memory (Glesne, 2011). These memos were turned into a running record of thoughts, ideas, questions, and reflections regarding particular interviews and the study in general.

An additional method to the preliminary data analysis was the development of analytic files to collect and organize data (Glesne, 2011). These files served as a tool to organize quotations that may have proven important when data analysis became more in-depth. These quotations from the data served as guide posts during thematic analysis, and assisted the researcher when connecting the data to the existing body of knowledge on the topic being studied (Glesne, 2011). Another analytic file kept referred to the connections from preliminary data analysis between the different school districts being studied. A file was also maintained to record biases and subjectivity, since these were aspects of the researcher role that may have diverted the researcher's attention from the purpose of this research.

The final preliminary data analysis strategy was the development of a coding scheme. Upon transcription and first reading of interview data, initial themes presented themselves. These early themes and ideas were turned into codes as a way to organize the ongoing data collection.

### **Data analysis.**

Data for this study was in the form of interview transcripts. Interview transcripts are complex collections of data that reflect not just the meaning of the participant, but also the positionality and theories of the researcher (Davidson, 2009). Since the superintendent interviews were critical to the development of the principal interview questions, the researcher transcribed those interviews in a timely manner. Time restraints led to having a professional transcriber turn subsequent interviews into textual data. The researcher worked with the transcriber to ensure they knew the intent of this study, as well as to ensure there were no critical errors or omissions (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998).

Once interviews were transcribed, they were entered into TAMS Analyzer, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. This software assisted the researcher in the organization of data and codes. Codes created during the preliminary data analysis served as the basis for the development of more in-depth codes.

Once interviews were transcribed and coded, a selection of interview excerpts were sent to an appropriately trained researcher in a related field. This person holds an Ed.D. and is trained in thematic coding. Inter-rater reliability is a key factor in making sure that the researcher's positionality and biases do not influence the way data are analyzed..

## **Role of the Researcher**

During the course of this study, the researcher assumed a number of roles that influenced him and the participants of the study. The roles that were taken were primary investigator, elementary school principal who is a member of the millennial generation, classroom technology proponent, and aspiring superintendent. By recognizing and addressing the impact of these roles, the researcher aimed to minimize the effect on the data collection and analysis.

### **Researcher bias.**

The researcher brought to this study a number of biases that must be acknowledged. As a school principal and member of the millennial generation, he understands the challenges that are unique to this role and age group. Additionally, he understands that the needs of millennial principals are different than their predecessors. As the researcher, he remained neutral to any tendency to favor the viewpoint of my generational peers. The researcher is also a proponent of classroom technologies and was careful to not let enthusiasm for these tools cloud the questioning during interviews or data analysis. Finally, the researcher has worked for superintendents who use very different methods for principal support. Though this study examined successful superintendents, the researcher had to remain open to hearing principal perspectives that do not positively address the research questions.

### **Researcher effects on the case.**

The biases above could have potentially influenced my examination of superintendent support of principals. When interviewing superintendents, the researcher attempted to stay focused on the research questions, ignoring the urge that he may have

had to interview from the “aspiring superintendent” role. Though there may have been great value in probing with follow up questions unrelated to the research topic, the researcher stayed narrowly focused on the confined topic of my study. As a current millennial principal, one can easily assume the “friend” researcher role as described by Glesne (2011). The principal participants of this study may have seen the researcher as an ally or colleague. During interviews, there was a need to remain conscious of body language in order to maintain the role of researcher and not confidant or commiserater. The last influence that had to be controlled is that of technology proponent. When interviewing principals, the researcher needed to monitor the urge to dig deeper on the specific technologies or how they are being used. As a principal, the researcher consistently searches for new and better ways of using technology in the classroom. This study could not become a way to learn new ideas; he had to remain focused on the intent of the study instead of his interests as a practitioner. At best, the researcher had the chance to establish relationships with the principal participants and use those relationships after the study is completed in order to learn about the ways they are implementing technology. Strategies to mitigate these biases included participant checks of interview transcriptions and the use of analytical files to document instances of subjectivity during data collection and analysis.

#### **Case effect on the researcher.**

Because the researcher entered this study with a number of biases and predispositions, he had to take measures to ensure the interpretation of the data is not influenced by those biases. During data collection, the researcher remained focused on

the research questions, ignoring any interest in pursuing conversation that is related to any interests outside the scope of this study.

Once data were collected, there were other measures taken to ensure the interpretation of the data is not influenced by biases. Once interview transcripts were coded, the researcher relied on a second rater to ensure there were reliable themes and codes. This second rater is a person who has already completed a doctoral dissertation, though in an unrelated field. If this second rater was able to identify similar themes, then the researcher biases had not influenced the analysis of the data.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

This phenomenological study sought to understand the leadership actions of successful California Superintendents who support millennial principals. By interviewing superintendents and millennial principals about goal setting and monitoring, autonomy, and leadership, data were collected that identify the successful actions taken by Superintendents.

Following each interview, the electronic recordings were transcribed into text. Once interviews were transcribed, they were entered into TAMS Analyzer, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. This software allowed the researcher to organize the data into themes and codes. Codes created during the preliminary data analysis served as the basis for the development of more in-depth codes. These codes were then re-analyzed in comparison to the themes and codes from the Superintendent interviews.

This study was driven by research questions that sought insight into the ways that superintendents support principals as they implement instructional technologies. Following an analysis of the data, there was a clear connection between superintendent support and principal actions. These connections were so strong that they often transcended the narrow focus of the implementation of classroom technologies. Furthermore, this study sought to highlight how superintendents promote instructional technology as a means to accomplishing district goals. The final focus of this study was

the way in which principals were granted defined autonomy as they work toward accomplishing district and school goals.

The findings of this study are organized along three strands, based on the research questions and the review of the relevant literature. Specifically, the findings are organized into the following areas: Goal Setting and Autonomy, Superintendent Leadership Practices, and Generational Differences. Following these three areas, a section of findings will be devoted to the common practices of the two Superintendents studied. Lastly, unanticipated findings will be shared and explained.

### **Goal Setting and Autonomy**

#### **District goal setting.**

This study set out to understand how Superintendents support a connection between instructional technology and district goals. A prevalent finding in this study centers on the practices Superintendents use to develop goals. Each district has dramatically different structures in place for the development of both district and principals' professional goals. The processes used in each District reflect the leadership styles of the Superintendents, but aim for the same end: high levels of success for principals, schools, and the district.

Both of the superintendents in this study set district goals with the input from district leaders and varied input from the Board. The District goals are then restated as site based goals. The superintendents expect that principals "articulate those goals to their staff members" (SA). Both of the studied Districts use state and federal accountability measures to guide the academic achievement goals, especially in District B, where most of the schools are in Program Improvement. In many cases, the state and

federal laws provide the schools and the district with specific levels of achievement that need to be attained. Though the goal setting processes differ, both superintendents aimed “to limit the number of goals we give our administrative team to focus in on about three key ones every year” (SB).

**Principal goal setting.**

The two superintendents in this study follow very different practices when it comes to setting principal goals. Most notably, the superintendents’ involvement of the creation of the goals differs greatly. In District A, the school site administrators’ goals are given to principals with little or no input from principals. “I actually develop the goals and objectives for the principals, so I’m very involved” (SA). The superintendent and members of her cabinet develop a booklet that contains the district, school, and principal goals already outlined with objectives and benchmarks. These booklets are individualized for each Principal and school, but the goals are “basically common goals for all the principals throughout” the District (DAPB). The Principals in District A make a clear connection between the goal packet, their evaluation, and the success of their school.

[The goal packet] has a letter from the Superintendent, and the administration vision and mission statement, and really what we're trying to do, the overarching theme, save high performance school, inspire, build, engage, motivate. And then looking at the objectives that we have, and they really help us out (DAPC).

In District B, the principals use the California Professional Standards for Education Leaders (CPSEL) as a source for the development of their own professional goals each year. Principals in that District have complete autonomy over their goals.

They arrive at their goal setting conference with goals in hand, ready to discuss with their Superintendent their plans for achieving the goals.

The goals and objectives are reviewed with the principals in both districts during a formal, yearly meeting between each individual principal and the superintendent. At that meeting, the principals in District A are provided the packet of their yearly goals. In both districts, these goals include school goals to be formalized in improvement plans and professional goals upon which the principals are to be evaluated.

In District A, the superintendent “develops the goals and objectives for the principals.” Principals are given no input into their goals. In both of the districts studied, the superintendents create annual goals for the schools and principals. In District A, principals receive a printed packet of their goals, which cover a wide variety of measurable improvements for the school and skills and dispositions of the principal. With the goal packet in hand, one principal commented: “I don't have any say in creating these goals. She creates them, and she tells us the expectation” (DAPA). Furthermore, the goals for principals in District A are uniform; they are not significantly differentiated by school or individual principals. According to one principal, the goal packets for the principals are “exactly the same. So we are all expected to do this.” In District B, the “district goals and school goals are completely reflective of one another” (DBPA). This connection is due in part to the federal accountability programs’ requirements for student growth, in addition to the goals focused on school climate, safety, and programs.

**Non-negotiable goals.**

Both superintendents are seen to have high and clear expectations for all staff, especially principals. “There are goals and objectives that are certainly tied to academic

performance, but there are also goals and objectives that are very tied to their leadership” (SA). In District B, which contains a number of schools in Program Improvement, goals are “pretty clearly defined by both the federal and state government.”

District B administrators are given “about three key goals” each year. The limited number of goals allows the school and district leaders to focus on “doing things well, rather than doing lots of things.” This is in contrast to District A, where principals receive upwards of 10 school and leadership goals each year.

Despite the difference in the number of non-negotiable goals, the expectations of both Superintendents are perceived by principals to be high. One principal clearly articulates this point:

One good thing about SA is she has very high expectations. Relentless. But the good thing about her is we all want to work for her and we all want to rise to those expectations. She knows if she says this needs to be done, it needs to be done (DAPA).

**Goal monitoring.**

There was limited evidence that the superintendents directly monitor goal progress at the school site level. Principals in both Districts varied in their perceptions of the superintendents’ frequent presence on their school site. However, both districts evidenced high visibility of cabinet members who serve as the “eyes and ears” of the superintendent. While principals from both districts reported varying amounts of superintendent visibility, there was an increased amount of visibility of the cabinet members and their support staff. According to Superintendent A, having Cabinet members on school campuses “allows me to be very connected with what goals are

actually reached at the site level; why they were reached, why they weren't reached, what strategies were actually in place.”

According to the Superintendents, the regularly scheduled management meetings are a time where goal progress is documented. In District B, the bi-weekly management staff meetings are a time for the Superintendent to monitor progress toward goals. Similarly, Superintendent A uses regularly scheduled meetings to get feedback and monitor progress toward goals. Through discussions and meetings, “goals constantly come back as a large group” where principals can share successes and struggles and talk to each other about strategies that are in place to achieve particular goals. Furthermore, Superintendent A and her cabinet regularly present to the Board of Trustees about goal progress at monthly Board meetings.

Principals reported internal goal monitoring practices that reflect a “data analysis” method (DBPB). Since millennial principals report using technology throughout their workflow, principals do not consider analyzing data without “thinking [about] technology” (DBPB).

#### **Use resources to support goals.**

Both districts demonstrated a high level of human and financial resources devoted to accomplishing school and district goals. Though the exact structures varied, there exists an overall focus of district personnel toward the support of principals and schools. The resources provided could be categorized as: staff support, financial support, and professional development.

#### ***District staff support***

Principals from both districts reported a high level of support from district staff.

This support is formally scheduled during management meetings and happens informally as needed on school sites. In one district, district level management team members are assigned to provide overall support to a particular site, as an added level of assistance to the principal. In both Districts, portions of regularly scheduled management meetings are given to a Cabinet member to give a “support presentation” (SA). For instance, the Asst. Superintendent of Business provided a budget review early in the year in District B. In District A, ongoing curricular projects, such as the transition to the Common Core State Standards, are discussed by the Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services. Special education administrators periodically review policies and best practices, or review new legislation that affects principal decision-making. In both districts, the Cabinet member who oversees personnel presented on the teacher evaluation process, so that principals could effectively evaluate and support teachers. In addition to these formal, scheduled support sessions, both districts have a culture of support that is put into practice by district level administrators and support staff.

In both districts, principals felt there was a trustworthy district level staff member that they could approach for any issue. The most cited departments that principals mentioned were budget, special education, personnel, and technology. In addition, District B principals sought support for a federally funded after school program and student progress data. In District A- which is much larger than District B- other areas of support for principals included student wellness and nutrition, content area specific curriculum, facilities and campus safety.

The superintendents are both considered to be “available,” “visible,” and “accessible” to principals. In addition, they were seen to be effective delegators and

“hired really good people” to be their “eyes and ears out in the schools” (DAPB). In District A, Cabinet members are assigned to particular schools to provide “a more supportive role” for each school. This is a new practice to increase the level of support given to principals. So, while the Superintendents themselves may not be the first line of support for principals, the Cabinet members are seen to be “super supportive” of principals and schools. Superintendent A is seen by her principals to be a master delegator, knowing when to involve herself or when to have her cabinet members help principals solve a problem or reach a goal. The principals have confidence in these individuals because -in both districts- most if not all cabinet members were brought up through the teaching and administrative ranks of the district. The principals’ faith in the abilities of the supporting cabinet members allows them to work closely with each other, and leads to the Principals’ perceptions that cabinet support is reliable and in line with the support they would receive directly from the Superintendent. As one principal stated, “she does a good job of making sure that other people support us” (DAPA).

With all of this delegation of support tasks, it is important to note that in both districts, principals felt comfortable and willing to approach the Superintendent if an issue was serious enough to warrant the Superintendent’s involvement. The availability of the Superintendent is an important trait that will be discussed further in this chapter.

### **Reflection on goal completion.**

In each of the studied districts, principals meet at the end of the school year to debrief on the progress they made toward their goals. Both Superintendents use these meetings as formal evaluation meetings for the principals. More experienced millennial principals displayed less concern for these meetings, seeing them more like progress

checks for long term goals. Newer millennial principals, however, gave these meetings more weight in terms of their performance evaluation.

While talking about these evaluation meetings, a number of principals recognized that being held to high expectations led to a feeling of “personal respect” between the principal and Superintendent. (DBPA) One Principal in District B reflected, “my perception of his leadership is that he is supportive of me reaching these goals.” (DBPB) She added that the level of support and respect lead to “the respect from the Superintendent and the others, to do your job.”

### **Defined autonomy.**

Both Superintendents create a culture of defined autonomy for their principals that transcends the implementation of instructional technology. Though principals are given little to no input on their school and evaluation goals in District A, they are provided significant leeway and support to attain the goals as they see fit. This allows access to implement emerging technologies in classrooms, as well as the use of technology in their everyday management of the school site. The autonomy given to principals is openly discussed. The studied superintendents do not seek uniformity from their principals. As Superintendent B bluntly put it,

I don't believe...everybody has to be 100% alike to accomplish their goals. As long as they have the outcome in mind and they're achieving the outcome, how they get there, as long as it's legal and not immoral, I don't care.

Similarly, Superintendent A communicates high expectations through the district, school, and principal goals. And, while the goals and expectations are clearly delineated, the expectations for goal achievement are broad. One common goal in

District A is 96% ADA (Average Daily Attendance). The Superintendent recognizes that,

everybody does it differently. But the ultimate goal is that you're building public confidence throughout the community, so how are you going to do that? Here's your target. How you get there, that becomes your job.

During their goal conference at the beginning of the school year, principals are given their goals, but told that their methods for achieving those goals is up to them and their school community. By recognizing that each school community is different, the Superintendents also recognize that the methods to achieve the same goals will differ as well. When asked specifically about technology as a means to achieving goals, Superintendent B expects younger principals to be using technology. From his viewpoint, millennial principals are "whizzes...because they've been doing it basically all their lives." These data indicate an understanding on the part of the Superintendents of the generational differences discussed in the literature and further analyzed below.

Superintendent A provides each principal with a packet of goals for their school and for the professional development of the principal. And, while the principals in these Districts "don't have any say in creating these goals," (DAPA), the Superintendent instructs the principals to "tell me how you plan to get to that goal."

I think one thing that I would pride myself on is that I trust the leadership of our principals, I really do. I admire their leadership and as I tell them often, 'I'm not the principal, you are. So you take it, you go with it'" (SA).

From the principals' point of view, they recognize that they have essentially no input on their goals. However, they appreciate the autonomy they are given in the

accomplishment of those goals. As one principal stated, “From the goals that are given to me, I would say that I have very little input. But in how I set those goals and reach those goals, for my site, I have a great deal of input. How I accomplish that, that’s truly up to me” (DAPB). Another principal addressed her level of autonomy more directly: “It’s not micromanaged. So I feel a lot of autonomy here. I feel like I can make my decisions” (DBPB). It is important to note that many of the resources necessary to implement the plans and practices of the principals come from District Office departments. The support and resources provided by the District level administrators is discussed below.

The practice of providing lofty goals for principals rests at the intersection of high expectations from the superintendent, recognition of the need for autonomy among the principals, and effective support for Principals and schools as they work toward the achievement of these goals.

### **Superintendent Leadership Practices**

Principals in both districts recognized their superintendent’s leadership skills in a number of different ways. Through formal goal setting and monitoring to site visits and “cheerleading” (DBPB), the superintendents find numerous ways to provide leadership and support to principals. Though the two studied leaders have differing leadership styles, each has garnered the respect and devoted following that leads to organizational success.

#### **Principal mentors.**

One practice that exists in both districts is the use of professional mentors for new principals. In District A, more experienced principals are formally trained and compensated to provide ongoing support to newer principals for the first year of the new principalship. In District B, the superintendent provides two years of outside

“professional coaches” to support the leadership needs of new principals (SB). In both districts, the mentor is intended to support the unique needs of the new principal, and the length of the mentorship can last between one and three years, depending on the individual principal’s needs.

From the superintendents’ perspectives, the coaches serve as an unbiased “professional coach” for the principals. (SB) The outside mentor is someone “that can help them that’s non-judgmental, not their boss, filter through the ‘administrivia’ and the real work of student progress.” (SB) According to the superintendents, having a support that is not supervisory or evaluative is a key to the value of the mentors. “I think that they’ve all felt very supported and very appreciative to have somebody they can work with and talk to that’s non-judgmental, that can help them through their thinking process.” (SB)

The principals reflected an appreciation for the mentors as a resource and support for new principals. Having the mentor be someone from outside the organization allows principals to “connect with” because they do not feel judged or evaluated by the questions they ask. (DBPA)

While District B uses outside mentors, Superintendent A trains and compensates principals who have “been successful and been doing this for a while.” The formality of the mentorship is supported by the superintendent in a number of ways. By compensating the mentors, the Superintendent can maintain expectations for their involvement.

We want it to be formal, that we have some expectations, that they’ll attend a few staff meetings, that they will, they’ll be at their back to school night,

that they'll be there. To say, you know, 'Would you mentor?' is one thing, but to say 'Will you mentor, and we'll give you \$1500 dollars,' is another thing (SA).

From the principals' perspective, the mentor is an effective support that meets the wide variety of needs of a new principal. From standard responsibilities like budgeting, to more complex staff and student issues, the principals rely on the mentors for support and to serve as a "sounding board." (DAPA) In extreme cases, the mentor also helps principals during out of the ordinary events, such as a new principal who had a fire break out at his school in the first months of his principalship. The mentor was there alongside the superintendent and her staff, as an added support during this challenging time.

One generational difference that emerged was the difference between the mentor principals and the millennial principals. Overwhelmingly, principals were appreciative of the level of support provided by these mentors. However, some principals noted that there are sometimes generational differences that emerge. According to Principal C in District A, "you may not always agree with a what it is [they are recommending], but you can value what they have to say and the rationale for saying it." Noting that millennials may solve problems with a different set of strategies, the principal commented, "we just have a different mindset." This underlying generational difference is further described in sections below.

New elementary principals whose previous experience had been in middle or high schools especially favored the mentors. Secondary schools typically have a larger administrative staff, providing more support and opportunities to discuss problems and

ideas. In District A, each of the principals who participated in this study had previous teaching and administrative experience at the middle or high school level. Therefore, the transition to elementary school principal was particularly challenging. One principal summarized the challenge and resulting need for a mentor:

It was tough. That isolated feeling of being the sole person, and not really having that confidant that I can go to down the hall, who has many years of experience, or going to the principal and talking to them and saying ‘well what about this.’ I'd have to pick up the phone and call someone at another school, and may or may not get ahold of them at that time (DAPB).

By providing formal mentors, Superintendent A helps address the many challenges of being a new principal. And, although the formal mentors in District A are District employees – as opposed to the outside advisors in District B - their equal standing as principals allows new principals to be open and honest with their questions. By providing mentors that are currently serving principals, the Superintendents are providing a resource that can share best practices and district history on certain issues to address the job-related needs of a new principal. On the other hand, these principal mentors also provide the coaching and encouragement that new principals need to feel confident in their new role.

I felt District A Unified -- I've not worked in any other district – really supported new principals extremely well and my mentor was, is, great. A very effective principal and really was helping me, guide myself, or guide me as being the leader of this school, and ‘try this, try that’ and things that

as a new principal, you're so overwhelmed with the newness of it (DAPC).

**Open door policy and superintendent accessibility.**

The Superintendents in both Districts were seen to be effective delegators.

However, both Superintendents stated that “visibility and accessibility” are critical skills for a Superintendent. Superintendent A summarized her supportive role in this way:

Whether they need me to come out or whether they need me to take a phone call or whether they need me to support something they are doing, that they can count on me and I will be there.

Principals in each district stated their comfort contacting the Superintendent in person, by phone, or via email to discuss issues or ask questions. This accessibility was reflected in the statements of both the superintendents and the principals.

The superintendents’ availability to principals came in many forms. Whether it was a quick email for reassurance about a decision made at the school site, to a late night phone call due to a personal matter, the superintendents’ availability to principals is visible “in a lot of different ways” (DAPC). In District B, a first year principal shared her comfort with the superintendent’s availability, noting that the superintendent often reminds her “You're doing a good job, keep going. If you need anything call me.” Though she recognized that most of the direct support comes from people other than the superintendent, the ease with which she can contact the superintendent, and the frequency of his “cheerleading” leads to the principal stating that she feels supported by her supervisor (DBPC).

Principals in both districts stated their comfort calling on the superintendent. In District B, the Superintendent’s reputation includes his “open door policy” that

encourages principals to come to him with questions, concerns, and even complaints.

The business card he hands out to colleagues and community members has his home and cell phone number. Every principal participant in this study made mention of their Superintendent's accessibility and openness to principal concern.

### **High expectations.**

“One good thing about [Superintendent A] is she has very high expectations. Relentless. But the good thing about her is we all want to work for her and we all want to rise to those expectations” (DAPA).

Through the goal setting process, the superintendents make “it really clear what their expectations are of us as administrators and principals and schools.” (DAPC) By being present on school sites, and through regularly scheduled management meetings, the superintendents make sure that their high expectations are not lost in the “administrivia” that can easily overtake business meetings. While some principals were able to articulate the specific practices that lead to high and clear expectations, others described the feelings of followership they have for their superintendent. In all, maintaining high expectations for schools and staff lead to high levels of commitment in the principals. “If she says this needs to be done, it needs to be done” (DAPA). This deep and genuine leadership is also reflected in the comments of Principal B from District A, who, before turning 40, was in her second principalship. Her first principalship was at a middle school that was failing academically and shrinking in enrollment. She successfully turned the school around into a technology magnet that has escaped the clutches of federal accountability laws. Her comments about the Superintendent reflect a leadership style and corresponding practices that illustrate the key factors of strong, effective

leadership.

She puts out the energy as our ultimate leader, and then we get catalyzed by that energy, and that creates more positive energy, and then hopefully we can do that with our staffs. Because we believe in her and it's so important to her, {She} is really guiding our ship and trying to find the safe waters for us, you know. And so, we all paddle along with her (DAPB).

### **Relationships**

I think the biggest skill that a superintendent has to have is just the skill of being a person that really is one who can really build relationships and culture and climate and is one that people can really count on. That people want to follow. And a lot of that is motivation and recognition and all of the relationship qualities, I still think that's 90% of the job (SA).

Superintendent A, with 12 years' experience as Superintendent of District A, recognizes that there are many aspects to being a successful leader. However, her comments above reflect her core belief that leadership comes from relationships. Her rise to Superintendent is unique; she began as an instructional aide and, over the years, rose through the ranks until being named Superintendent. However, throughout her many roles in the district, she aimed to build trusting and respectful relationships with all stakeholders. Each of the studied superintendents has more than 9 years of tenure in their position. Over time, each has made great efforts to build supportive relationships with staff and the community.

#### **Relationships with staff.**

One of the keys to building relationships with staff and school leaders is to be

present on campus and accessible to staff. Principals feel close to their superintendent when they feel they have an “informal ability to be able to go in” and talk with their superintendent. Furthermore, relationships are strengthened over time. In both districts, there is a common practice of hiring principals from within. This allows new principals to feel allegiance to the superintendent and their vision. This also leads to new principals having well-established relationships with the superintendent. It can also be assumed that aspiring principals in these districts who do not successfully build relationships will not be given the opportunity to assume administrative positions.

Principals in district A refer to their superintendent by her first name. This is an easily overlooked glimpse into the caring and supportive relationships that are developed. Though principals often referred to the superintendent’s authority and distinction, their use of the superintendent’s first name demonstrated meaningful and respectful relationships. District B lies wedged between two military bases, and the more formal greetings are likely a result of this community norm, and less of an indication of the relationships built over time by the Superintendent.

### **Relationships with community.**

During the time this study was conducted, both districts passed ballot measures that increased taxes for their community, in order to support school programs and initiatives. The election process provided a unique glimpse into the ways that the superintendents engage their communities in order to increase support for their district. One principal summed up the reason she gave many hours outside of the workday to support the passage of the ballot measure. “Because we believe in her and it's so important to her. If we had another superintendent, I would not have put in that energy”

(DAPB).

One of the goals for every principal in District A is to build “public confidence in the local school.” This goal urges principals to be involved in the community surrounding their school. Principals have autonomy to decide how to best be involved in their community. Some join community organizations, such as the Lions Club, while others regularly network with local business owners.

Proactive community engagement has also resulted in benefits to the schools in District B, where the Superintendent is proud of a local grocery store’s annual gift to one of the district schools. The donation is typically between \$25,000 and \$30,000, and the beneficiary school can spend the money in the way they see fit, though the funds are typically directed toward classroom technology. Both superintendents model and expect active relationships with the communities they serve, in order to build public confidence and provide benefits to the schools.

### **Generational Differences**

Both superintendents in this study acknowledged the differences between Baby Boomers and Millennials. During interviews with each of the superintendents, they indicated that they were aware of these differences based on familiarity with related research combined with their lived experiences working with principals from the Millennial generation. Most notable, the differences are in “the way they access information, the way they communicate, and the way they problem solve” (SA).

Superintendent A was so aware of and concerned with these differences and how they might affect the way district leaders worked together, she made a presentation to both district and site administrators about the differences between the three generations in

the workplace.

My whole focus was on generational differences. We had a lot of fun with it, but what my goal was that we would all see that we are now working with as, in our employee groups, we have incredibly different life experiences. I think it's more exaggerated than ever before.

Superintendent B points to the differences in communication skills and practices used by the younger generation of Principals as a source of friction. For instance, he reflected on the increased use of email, text messages, and social networks as means for communicating. One of the areas of focus for the professional coaches is to address the best ways to effectively communicate to employees individually and as a group.

### **Relationships.**

Both of the Superintendents in this study made mention of their perceptions of the way millennial principals form relationships.

Generally speaking, they don't take the amount of time in relationship building that I think they should. I don't think that problem solving can be done quickly and I don't think it can be done through technology. I think you've got to establish relationships (SA).

Superintendent B's concerns with Millennial relationships are centered on the way that Millennials communicate, citing it as the "biggest difference" between his and the Millennial generations. The prevalence of email and short, electronic, text based communication removes the nuances of face-to-face communication. In his description, emails are "short, curt, and don't take feelings into account very well." He reflected on numerous occasions when young principals used email to transmit a message to staff

members, only to find that the message was misinterpreted, leading to friction on the campus. He also pointed to the fact that emails can be forwarded, shared, and taken out of context, whereas face-to-face discussions allow for the principal to immediately mend hurt feelings or address misunderstandings.

Superintendent B's concerns about Millennial Principals' communication practices are based on his idea that the way Principals communicate is also "how they lead." Therefore, if they are not able to effectively communicate- especially with earlier generations- they will struggle to build confidence, relationships, and a coalition to lead their school.

#### **Goal setting.**

The Millennial generation seeks to have input on their professional goals. They have a desire to retain ownership over their work and purpose. In this study, one of the Baby Boomer superintendents provides a booklet of goals for principals. This practice does not mesh with the needs of the Millennial generation. Specifically, millennials wish to be given the due respect and autonomy they feel they deserve. As professionals, Millennials wish to be given autonomy over their professional goals. Principals in both districts have either limited or no input on their goals, though both superintendents seek to "get their buy in" (SA).

The principals in District A recognize the disparity between their generational needs and the practices of the district. One principal remarked that the booklet of goals, which "gets added to every year," has become "a little too much."

#### **Work and family.**

One key difference between the Baby Boomer and Millennial generations is the

employee's ideas of work vs. family. Previous generations, such as the Baby Boomers, might not think twice about working extended hours or coming in outside normal work hours if asked by a supervisor. Superintendent B noted that at the age of 30, "if my boss asked me to show up on Christmas morning, I would have shown up on Christmas morning." This Superintendent recognized the different views on work, noting "they (Millennials) don't view work the same way I view work." Because of this, some Principals voiced their conflicting desire to work hard and be a parent, noting that she often leaves afternoon meetings to "pick up kids and take them to soccer. There's quite a few of us in that situation" (DAPA). Of the Millennial Principals interviewed, 80% have children of elementary school age or younger.

#### **Differences among principal generations.**

One finding that emerged from the Principal participants is not just the generational difference between the Superintendent and the Millennial Principals, but the generational differences among principals. While there are an increasing number of young principals being hired in both Districts, there are also a number of experienced principals, who may work, lead, and communicate differently than the emerging leaders. Some of the principals pointed to the "old school mentality" held by some of the long tenured Principals (DAPC). Whereas young Principals seek "collaborative" and "interconnected" principal teams, there still remains a sense of some older principals operating as "islands" (DAPC).

#### **Early administrative experience and career plans.**

A commonality among all of the interviewed Principals is an early start in school administration. One principal was "the youngest administrator ever hired in [District A]

at 26 years old” (DAPA). This early start led to her first principalship at 32 years old. No principal interviewed spent more than 9 years in the classroom before being hired as a principal, assistant principal, or program specialist in the special education department. The average classroom experience of the participating principals was 5.6 years.

Though their early starts may have been the result of fortuitous timing, such as an unexpected retirement or medical leave of an established administrator, many of the participating principals had their eyes on administration early on in their careers. In District A, each principal entered his or her administrative credentialing program after the urging of the superintendent, who characterizes the new generation of principals as “driven.”

### **Common Practices**

During the analysis of the data, a number of similar practices emerged. Though both superintendents have differing styles of leadership and management, there are a few key practices that are seen to positively affect leadership and support for Millennial Principals.

#### **Hiring from within.**

As mentioned in the review of the literature, one of the characteristics of Millennials is a lack of loyalty to the organization. Whereas Baby Boomers would never “think about leaving the District,” Millennials are characterized by their willingness to leave one organization for a better opportunity in another organization.

That being the case, one interesting finding in this study is that all of the participating principals began their education careers in the Districts where they now serve as principals. Both of the superintendents build a sense of vision and expectations

that seems to overcome the Millennial's characteristic lack of loyalty. The practice of hiring from within allows the Superintendents to provide autonomy to principals, knowing that they are well inculcated in the mission, vision, and goals of the district.

**Strong cabinet support.**

Another commonality between the two districts studied is the strong sense of support the superintendents' cabinet provides to principals. Whether it's a "support presentation" during regularly schedule principal meetings or on an as needed basis, the principals and superintendents both point to strong support from Cabinet members as a key to success for school leaders (SA). All of the principals mentioned specific ways that the Cabinet members have helped them achieve goals. Departments such as Technology, Human Resources, Curriculum, and Budgeting were all mentioned as helpful and supportive.

When asked about support from the superintendent, many principals indicated that ongoing, direct support from the superintendent is minimal. However, the presence and reachability of the Cabinet members is seen as an extension of the superintendents' leadership, sometimes described as the "eyes and ears" of the Superintendent (DAPB). In District A, as well, a new practice is to assign Cabinet members to schools in order to serve "in a more supportive role" (DAPB). These assignments are generally based on the school's needs and goals. So, while the superintendent's presence on the school campus is limited, one principal had already met "four or five times" with her assigned support person. Their meetings were based on the general support needs of the school. Another principal reported that in his first year as Principal, he had regular visits from 4 members of the Superintendent's Cabinet, giving him ample opportunity to discuss his goals and

needs, as well as "what support they can provide us." This resulted in the principal feeling supported, remarking "from the top down, we really see they're here to support us" (DAPC).

Principals in District B also point to strong and reliable support from the Superintendent's Cabinet as a key to success. One principal, reflecting on her experiences during her first year as principal, relied on an Assistant Superintendent who had previously been a principal at the school, so he was able to provide insight on individual staff members and the staff's collective past experiences (DBPB). This principal also noted that the Assistant Superintendent often visits the school or checks in by phone, checking on the progress of particular initiatives, "keeping me on my toes, making sure I am staying on task. She is supporting me in that way." District B Principals also point to the Directors of Technology and After School Programs, whose specialized knowledge helps the principals administer specialized programs at their schools. Principal B summarized her perspective on the support she receives from the Cabinet members:

They're here for me and any little question, and I feel like I can trust them. I don't feel like I have to worry about looking stupid or foolish. I can ask them and they will come almost at the drop of a hat if I ask them to come to be here to have a conversation.

A department in both Districts that upon which principals depend is Technology. Primarily, principals noted the need for technology support so that the hardware and software they are using can be reliable. Support in technology also came in the form of data analysis. In District B, Principal B noted that her reliance on the use of student data

is supported by a staff member from the district office, who runs reports and helps the Principal make the reports clear to teachers. These reports are then used for instructional planning and intervention.

The prevalence of wireless internet varied from school to school in each of the districts, yet those Principals who piloted mobile devices such as netbooks or laptops were able to acquire a limited wireless network so that the pilot programs could be effective. These capital expenses came from the District office, and were critical to the implementation of emerging technologies.

### **Openness to emerging technologies.**

In both of the studied districts, the superintendents are aware of and supportive of the use of technology. Each of the principal participants made mention of ideas, programs, and pilot programs at their school that utilize technology to achieve instructional goals. The programs in place include a 1:1 laptop program in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade (DAPA), mobile netbook labs for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade (DAPB), online curriculum that students can access from home (DBPA), and 1:1 netbook classrooms (DBPB). Funding for all of these programs comes from the District or categorical programs at the school site. These programs are all designed to help achieve school and district goals. The support of the superintendent, whether through funding or providing human resources to support the hardware necessary to implement the programs, is critical to the success of these innovative uses of technology.

### **Unanticipated Findings**

During the course of this research, there were a small number of findings that contradicted the previous literature. Mostly, the contradictions were found in the

characteristics of Millennials.

### **Millennial relationships.**

Contrary to the recent literature on Millennials, the principals involved in this study have a high self-perception of relationship building with staff and in terms of relationship building among students and school community in general. One principal attributed her ability to reach many of her school goals to “having relationships with your support providers at the district.” These relationships were not only with Cabinet members, but also referred to support staff, including technology support providers and maintenance workers. This same Principal told of the time she spent the summer before her first year as principal:

The summer before we started I met with every single teacher individually. I took them out to lunch or coffee or breakfast or whatever. I spent my whole summer just meeting the staff one on one because I didn't want them to judge me as a group (DAPA).

Other principals spoke directly about building and maintaining relationships, particularly with their teachers. Whether it's providing all staff with their personal cell phone number, or taking the time to meet staff when first coming to a school site, Millennial Principals reported more relationship building efforts than were to be expected by the relevant literature and the superintendents.

This disparity can be explained by a few possibilities. First, the relevant literature on Millennials cannot be assumed to refer to every person in the Millennial generation. There are, of course, expected to be young principals who do not follow the general expectations of their generation. Secondly, superintendents do not see the day-to-day

interactions of principals at their school site, so they may only be aware of generational issues that present themselves during meetings, or come to the superintendent as complaints or problems.

**Millennial work ethic.**

Each superintendent referenced a difference in the work ethics of their generation compared to the Millennials. Superintendent B referred to the work ethic of Millennials in this way:

For many younger people it's they want to, they don't mind working, but they're not going to let work get in the way of their play. And so sometimes that can be viewed as they don't have the work ethic as some of our older people. And that's a generality because there's a lot of younger people that would give you the impression. But their thought about work is a little bit different, you know. And I don't want to mean that they're not working hard, they don't view work the same way I view work.

Despite this generality, two of the principals studied reported having serious medical issues at one time, due to their overworking.

Last year I had pneumonia and I almost died. I got very sick because even though I was on leave with pneumonia, I was still having to work. And yes they brought in a principal for me to take my place but I still had to work, I couldn't just let it go. There was so much going on. And right leading up to me getting sick, I was getting like 3-4 hours of sleep a night, you know, there's just so much work to be done, and I was trying to live up to her expectations. I was trying to do it all, and I wasn't sleeping enough and I

wasn't taking care of myself (DAPA).

From the same District, Principal B shared a similar story about her first year as an Assistant Principal at a high school:

So my first year was crazy, I almost had a heart attack. We went through our WASC accreditation, I was taking my administrative classes, I was working crazy hours, including every weekend pretty much. And then there was one month where I worked 21 days straight because it was WASC, and we also had an audit going for our English learners, and I had my masters comps all within 6 weeks. And I literally had heart palpitations from working too much. But I stuck with it.

Clearly, these two stories are outliers, yet they represent something in the Millennial generation that seeks to achieve excellence, contrary to the held beliefs of both superintendents.

### **Summary**

In all, the leadership of the studied superintendents shows that effective leadership and support can transcend the generational differences between superintendents and principals. In some cases, the superintendent practices mirrored each other, while in others, the practices of the district leaders were discrepant, yet yielded the same results. Many of the highlighted practices in this chapter are supported by the academic literature on the topics of leadership, vision, goal setting, and principal support.

While the superintendents' actions and practices were in line with the literature, the same cannot be said for Millennial Principals. Millennial Principals have met many of the generational expectations (e.g. autonomy and goal setting), but have defied the literature

in others (i.e. work ethic and relationships).

Through careful study and analysis of the leadership and support practices of these two accomplished and esteemed superintendents, this chapter has provided an outline and significant detail of the practices that lead to superintendent and principal success.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

The final chapter of this study provides a discussion on the meaning behind the findings, as well as an analysis of how the findings relate to the current, relevant literature on the topics of goal setting and autonomy, superintendent leadership, and the generational differences between Baby Boomers and Millennials. Prior to this analysis, the background of the study will be restated, along with a summary of the research methodology. The implications of this research will be discussed, along with how the findings relate to policy and practice in school districts. Finally, this chapter will conclude with recommendations for future avenues of inquiry, the intent being to provide future researchers with areas for study.

#### **Summary of the Study**

##### **Overview of the problem.**

Data collected by the California Department of Education suggest that California superintendents remain largely in a static age group, mostly falling in the later years of the “Baby Boomer” generation (Matthews, 2002). At the same time, the age of a newly hired principal is decreasing (Suckert, 2008). The youngest of these principals were born between 1975 and 1985 and are considered the “millennial” generation, and –in order to be successful–require different supports (flexibility, autonomy, access to resources) than their predecessors in order to promote academic improvement, especially through the use of classroom technologies (Harris, 2005; Horn, 2001).

### **Purpose of the study.**

This multiple case study sought to identify the leadership and support practices of two long-tenured Superintendents whose districts have shown academic improvement over the course of the superintendents' tenure. Through interviews and in-depth analysis, this study provides new and aspiring superintendents with a description of the successful leadership and support practices of these two accomplished and revered superintendents.

### **Research questions.**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

How do successful Superintendents of academically improving districts support millennial principals who promote teacher use of emerging instructional technologies?

- How do Superintendents promote a connection between instructional technology and the district vision and goals?
- What actions do Superintendents take to support principal efforts to implement classroom technologies?
- How do Superintendents provide principals with “defined autonomy” in regards to implementing technologies?

### **Methodology.**

Data were collected through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with the superintendents, followed by interviews with the Millennial Principals. The sum of the data for this study was qualitative, in the form of interview transcripts. Using a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, the transcribed data were coded

into themes and sub themes, based on the review of the literature in Chapter 2 of this study.

The transcripts for the superintendents were analyzed first, leading to the interview protocols for the principals in each of the districts. The interview data from principals were analyzed in a similar manner, using software to organize data into themes. All of the data were then re-analyzed as one large sum of data, and then organized into the areas of Goal Setting and Autonomy, Superintendent Leadership Practices, and Generational Differences.

These three areas provide the backdrop for the major findings of this study. This study points to effective superintendent leadership and support practices as a major contributor to successful young principals. A superintendent's vision is a major area of focus for this study. Specifically, the superintendents studied provide clear, lofty, non-negotiable goals for principals. (Aplin & Daresh, 1984; Marzano & Waters, 2007) With these high expectations come effective support and encouragement from the superintendents. At the same time, superintendents provide resources to new, young principals that lead to further success. (Burbach & Butler, 2005) While providing high goals as well as high levels of support, superintendents also provide principals with significant autonomy to lead their schools. (Bottoms, et al., 2010; Waters & Marzano, 2007) Lastly, the generational differences between superintendents and principals were recognized, valued, and accounted for in the practices at the district and school site levels. In many cases, the expected generational differences played out in expected ways. Concurrently, some generational expectations were transcended by other characteristics of the principals.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

Academic research from the last two and a half decades points to the important role played by the superintendent. (Adams, 1987; Barth, 1990; Burbach & Butler, 2005; Burnett, 1989; Leithwood, 2004; Togneri, Anderson, & Learning First Alliance, 2003; Waters & Marzano, 2007) The ability of the superintendent to set high goals and support school personnel in their work to reach those goals is related to the success of the superintendent and the district. As Lee (2005) suggests, principal and superintendent success are interdependent; one cannot succeed without the other. What follows is a synthesis of this study's findings, related to the relevant research.

### **Goal setting.**

The research questions that guided this study focused on the connection between superintendent support and principals' work toward goal achievement through the use of technology. A major focus of the findings of this study was the process used by superintendents to set district, school, and principal goals. It must be noted that the process of goal setting does not directly involve instructional technology. However, as will be discussed in the context of generational differences, technology use by principals is widespread and second nature.

The superintendents varied widely in their goal setting practices, though each set of practices led to high, non-negotiable goals with a high level of followership in principals. The major finding here was that *the goal setting process was less important to success than the level of support and autonomy given to principals once the goals were established*. While both of the superintendents have created a vision for student learning and achievement in their districts (Togneri, 2003), their process for the development of

these goals is different. Another key point to these findings is that the superintendents supervise and evaluate the principals, and are aware of the progress and areas of need for each of the principals. How they stay informed of progress varies, mostly based on the size of the district.

As stated, the studied leaders vary in their goal setting practices. Superintendent A develops goals for the District and school sites with input from the School Board.

My goals, as the Superintendent, are very well established and really reflect the vision and the mission and the guiding principles of our district. So then I develop the -- I personally don't, but we, the board and I, develop the Superintendent goals.

Once these goals are established, they are presented to the cabinet, who work with the superintendent to create the school site and Principal goals.

We develop the goals for the leadership team as a reflection of my goals. And then, when we take it to the principal level, every principal has their goals and objectives for the upcoming school year, and they all tie back to our vision and mission and guiding principles.

Once the principal and school site goals are written, they are presented to principals in the form of a comprehensive goal packet, which serves as a guide for the principals' yearly evaluation. The goals in these packets are nearly identical, with variation based on the level of the school (i.e. elementary, middle, high).

The process used by Superintendent A does not actively include the principals. Though not outwardly asked, the reason for the exclusion of principals from the process seemed due to the size of the district, and less as a function of any lack of openness by

the superintendent. While common thought on goal setting leans toward an inclusive process (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), District A's process uses the informal input of principals while relying on the direct participation of the School Board and Superintendent's cabinet. Furthermore, while recent research suggests that a vision and derivative goals will not be considered "shared" without active input from stakeholders, (Kouzes & Pozner, 2007; Senge, 2006) Principals in District A report high levels of buy-in and followership toward their superintendent. As one principal noted, "She puts out the energy as our ultimate leader, and then we get catalyzed by that energy, and that creates more positive energy" (DAPB). Superintendent A creates a sense of ownership and buy-in through effective leadership and high expectations, which transcends the lack of input principals have on the goal setting process.

Despite this high level of followership, some principals indicated a desire to have more input on their goals. As one principal bluntly put it, "I think the principals should have more say into these goals" (DAPA). This desire to have input into goals seems to the researcher to be more a function of generational desires than it is a lack of leadership or buy-in. In sum, the goal setting practices of Superintendent A do not follow the research on the process of creating a shared vision. However, due to many factors of leadership, the superintendent's deep ties to the district and community lead to a shared vision. One of these factors, to be discussed below, is the practice of hiring school leaders from within the district.

Superintendent B, leading a district approximately one fourth the size of District A, provides increased opportunity for principals to have input on district and school goals. His ability to be on school sites is increased due to the number of schools in the

district, and does not seem to be an indicator of any deficiency on the part of Superintendent A. In fact, her ability to know the needs of each school and principals was noted by the Principals, and reflects her ability to delegate and manage a skilled Cabinet.

To summarize this finding, the goal setting process used by a school district can vary widely; there is no one right way to set goals. However, the culture of the district and the means by which the goals are supported at the school site are more important factors that lead to buy-in and success. This leads directly into the second major finding of this study.

#### **Goal monitoring and support.**

Another major finding is that *District staff monitor goal progress and offer meaningful, consistent, and reliable support to principals in a manner that is in line with the professional culture of the district. Furthermore, this support is considered by principals to be an extension of the Superintendent's office.* The major focus of this study was the actions taken by Superintendents as they support Millennial Principals. The level of direct superintendent participation in ongoing goal monitoring was limited in both districts. The major forms of goal monitoring practiced by the superintendents were informal discussions and site visits. However, the practices that led to the highest level of goal monitoring were related to the supportive nature of the district staff, which are directed by the superintendent. This practice reflects the work of Deming (1986), who identified organizational success as the work and responsibility of all members of the organization. Similarly, Bolman & Deal (1991) suggest that “vision without strategy is

an illusion,” meaning that superintendents must have concrete plans and expectations for those providing direct support to principals.

Assistant Superintendents and Directors from the district office were reported by principals to be the main sources of meaningful support. Their support is directed toward the achievement of school goals, and the progress toward those goals is reported back to the Superintendent.

They're here for me and any little question, and I feel like I can trust them. I don't feel like I have to worry about looking stupid or foolish. I can ask them and they will come almost at the drop of a hat if I ask them to come to be here to have a conversation (DBPB).

Support for the use of technology was also a critical piece toward goal achievement. This support was in the form of hardware support and data analysis, and like other district supports, was easily accessed by principals. Across the study, principals reported a high level of support from district staff, and Principals recognized that the district staff was expected to report back to the superintendent, serving as the “eyes and ears” of the superintendent at the school site (DAPB). Goal monitoring in both districts was informal, yet it was consistent and related to supportive practices, rather than policing the work of the principals.

### **Formal mentors.**

There was one supportive practice that was highly important to principals, yet structured differently in the two districts. *The use of formal mentors for new Principals led to high levels of support and self efficacy among Principals.* Burbach & Butler (2005) contend that principal support is a direct responsibility of the Superintendent. Roelle

(2010) found that school goals were more likely to be met if principals were supported and able to practice and improve their own leadership. The use of mentors for new principals addresses these assertions, and, in this study, led to a sense of support and encouragement for principals. The need of mentors is furthered by the age of the Millennial Principals. Of all the participants, the longest classroom career was 9 years, indicating a level of experience far less than the typical newly hired principal.

In District A, the mentors were selected from among the more experienced principals in the district. The mentors are given an annual stipend and expected to be a consistent and reliable support for the new principal to whom they are assigned. In District B, the mentors are hired from outside the district, as the pool of principals in this district is much smaller. In District B, the mentors are retired administrators who serve in the same supportive capacity. The mentors do not have “supervisory or evaluative roles”, and can therefore be “non-judgmental” when working with new principals (SB). In both districts, mentors were used to support technology implementation. However, this support came mostly in the form of budgeting advice or advice on how to advocate for their school. Principals did not report a direct use of mentors for the implementation of technology. This finding is not surprising when considered in the context of the generational differences between most of the mentor principals and the participant principals.

Again, while the details of the use of mentors differ between the studied Districts, the level of importance to Principals in both Districts was very high. One Principal provided a clear summary of the importance mentors have,

I felt District A Unified -- I've not worked in any other district -- really

supported new principals extremely well and my mentor was, is, great. A very effective principal and really was helping me, guide myself, or guide me as being the leader of this school, and ‘try this, try that’ and things that as a new principal, you're so overwhelmed with the newness of it (DAPC).

### **Hiring from within.**

Another practice discovered to be in common across the two Districts was the practice of hiring within. In both Districts, *a significant number of Principals and District administrators are promoted from within the District ranks.* This practice leads to high levels of trust among Principals. All of the Principal participants in this study were teachers in the District where they are now a Principal. Principals also noted that most of the Cabinet served as Principals in the District before being promoted to District leadership positions.

Hiring from within leads to a significant level of trust, buy-in, and a culture that supports attainment of lofty goals. “Every administrator within our, for the most part, in the district level and majority of them within the sites, are home-grown” (DAPC). By hiring District and school leaders from within the District, Superintendent A knows that her vision and high expectations are well known by the leaders in the District.

From the perspective of Superintendent B, “We always had at least one principal change every year, if not more.” When the new Principal is from within the District and familiar with the goals and culture of the District, they are more likely to be successful stepping into a leadership role at a school site.

By maintaining a clear vision of high expectations and lofty goals, and by building leadership capacity in the school District, the Superintendents create

“homegrown” leaders that more easily step into the role of Principal. As the key change agent in a school (Barth, 1990), the Principal is a critical position for which these Superintendents plan for and grow leadership within the District.

**Autonomy.**

I don't believe...everybody has to be 100% alike to accomplish their goals. As long as they have the outcome in mind and they're achieving the outcome, how they get there, as long as it's legal and not immoral, I don't care (SB).

This sentiment clearly communicates an important finding of this study that relates to the level of autonomy Principals have at their school site. A research question from this study aimed to understand how the concept of defined autonomy is used by Superintendents to provide clear goals, high expectations, and autonomy to achieve those goals.

This study found that in both Districts, *Principals and Superintendents identify that significant levels of autonomy are important for goal achievement*. Principals in both of the studied Districts report high levels of autonomy in regards to leading school programs. Additionally, both Superintendents made outward mention of the importance of a Principal's autonomy to run their school the best way they see fit. “Here's your target. How you get there, that becomes your job” (SA). This is the sentiment that Superintendent A shares with new Principals, indicating that they are free to run their schools the way they see fit, so long as it is in line with the District culture. All of the Principals in this study reported some level of emerging technologies on their campus as a means of achieving their school and district goals. Principals reported no sense of friction when it came to trying new technologies, and each had at least one “pilot” project

at work in their school. These pilot programs fell into two categories: online curriculum and 1:1 mobile device programs. These initiatives were funded by school and District funds, and were universally supported by the Superintendent and tech support staff from the District.

This level of independence and autonomy is also important for the Millennial generation, who seeks to have independence and value flexibility. (Emeagwali, 2011) Principals in this study reported various examples of their autonomy at work. Whether the school had an alternative bell schedule, increased levels of classroom technology, or offered different interventions for students, the Principals in this study all reported a high level of comfort in their ability and permission to make decisions at their site. As more Principals from the Millennial generation are hired, Superintendents need to be aware of the generational needs for autonomy and independence.

#### **Millennial relationships.**

During the course of this study, the Millennial generation's unique needs served as a guidepost for data analysis. Namely, this generation's needs for flexibility, teamwork, and autonomy are hallmarks for the working needs of Millennials. Along with these needs, there are assumptions that the Baby Boomer Superintendents made about Millennials. Some of these assumptions were not actualized by the data.

Both Superintendents in this study believed that Millennial Principals had a shortcoming when it comes to building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders.

Generally speaking, they don't take the amount of time in relationship building that I think they should. I don't think that problem solving can be done quickly and I don't think it can be done through technology. I think you've

got to establish relationships (SA).

The above quotation underlines the Baby Boomer generation's perception of Millennials. However, this study found that *Millennials value relationships, and take more time to develop relationships than is perceived by their Superintendents. Additionally, Millennials go about building relationships in different ways than their generational predecessors.*

This discrepancy in the perceptions of Millennial relationship building is a product of a few factors. First, Baby Boomers have relied on face-to-face communication their entire lives. In their previous career roles, the participant Superintendents did not have ubiquitous forms of electronic communication, such as are the norm for the Millennial generation. Tasks such as scheduling meetings, instructional planning, and organizing events used to occur through person-to-person conversations. Today's young Principals have grown up in a world where scheduling a meeting takes place via emailed calendar invites, and changes can be made online via calendaring software. Many of the day-to-day "administrivia" can now be handled electronically and without face-to-face interaction. Millennials know that simple tasks can be handled electronically, and no longer require the physical presence of the other involved parties. This technological difference can lead to break downs in communication and a sensed lack of personal connection between Millennials and other generations. Lastly, Superintendents expressed concerns about the prevalence of social networks, such as Facebook, in the lives of Principals. Superintendents worried that Principals may be unfairly judged based on their online actions, and cautioned Principals to be guarded about what they put online.

Another factor that leads to a discrepancy in the perception of Millennial relationships is the way that the separate generations define “relationship.” Whereas the Baby Boomer generation sees relationships as a function of interpersonal, emotional connection (Howe, 2005), Millennials see relationships as the interdependence based on practical needs. The Millennials’ definition of relationships seems uncaring or disconnected to the Baby Boomers, and most likely contributes to the perception shared above by Superintendent A.

### **Limitations and Generalizability**

Although this study provided a large amount of data collected from many sources, there are limitations to the generalizability of the data. The limitations are caused by the size of the sample and the resulting lack of diversity between the studied districts. At the same time, the findings of this study have been strongly built from the data that was collected.

The primary limitation to this study is the size of the sample. By only collecting data from two districts, the data are limited to the experiences and perceptions of Principals and Superintendents from two districts in the same county. Though the districts vary in enrollment and demographics, there are geographically close to each other and may be considered similar based on location alone.

Despite the small sample size, the findings are strongly supported by the data collected from Principals and the Superintendents, and reflect the literature concerning leadership, autonomy, and generational needs. Because of the richness of the data that was collected and analyzed, the findings can and should be used by practicing or aspiring Superintendents.

## **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The purpose of this study was to inform the practice of current or aspiring Superintendents. Though some districts may not yet have hired any Millennial Principals, the near future will see an influx of school leaders from this generation (Suckert, 2008). Therefore, District leaders should be prepared to support the needs and leadership practices of these new leaders.

*Finding: The goal setting process was less important to success than the level of support and autonomy given to principals once the goals were established.* The implications of this finding related less to the goal setting process used by Superintendents, and more closely implicate the supports and autonomy given to Principals once the goals have been established. Superintendents should ensure that they are using goal setting processes that are transparent and reflective of the current reality in the school District (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). More importantly, though, they should have a strong and thorough plan for supporting Principals as they work toward their school and professional goals. By making sure that Principals understand the level of autonomy they have, and by providing human and financial resources, Superintendents will be properly supporting the needs of Principals.

*Finding: District staff monitor goal progress and offer meaningful, consistent, and reliable support to Principals in a manner that is in line with the professional culture of the District. Furthermore, this support is considered by Principals to be an extension of the Superintendent's office.*

A further practice that will help support Millennial Principals is for Superintendents to have high and clear expectations for the level of support provided by

District administrators. The Principals in this study universally pointed to reliable support from District staff as an important contributor to success. District administrators were seen to be a reliable and non-judgmental support for the needs of the Principal and the school. When staff is easily accessible and provides meaningful support, Principals feel more empowered and may be more likely to practice high levels of leadership on their campus.

*Finding: The use of formal mentors for new Principals led to high levels of support and self efficacy among Principals.*

Another area that can be improved through the use of this study's findings is the way in which Superintendents provide staff support for Principals. Without question, one of the most helpful supports reported by Principals was the professional mentor provided by the District. Whether the mentor was a sitting or retired Principal, the Millennial Principals reported great appreciation for the mentor program. Superintendents should strongly consider having a plan for providing mentors for new Principals, especially Millennial Principals, who will have had less general experience than Principals hired from previous generations.

*Finding: Millennials value relationships, and take more time to develop relationships than is perceived by their Superintendents. Additionally, Millennials go about building relationships in different ways than their generational predecessors.*

Superintendents must recognize the different ways that Millennials communicate and build relationships. Conducting meetings without the use of electronic materials does not value the Millennial generation's desire to handle information electronically. Millennials have not been raised in a world that requires them to take hand written notes

or to record calendar appointments on a paper calendar. By providing easy access to electronic materials, Superintendents are supporting the needs of their youngest leaders. The logistical portion of this practice is that Millennials need to be given access to electronic devices and ubiquitous Internet connectivity.

Related to this practice is a Superintendent's openness to supporting the development of Personal Learning Networks (PLN) between and among Principals. By using social media and other web tools (i.e. blogging, cloud storage, social networks, digital media), Principals can expand their support network. By understanding the difference between social networking used for sharing personal details from one's life (i.e. posting pictures of one's dog on Facebook) and social networking used for professional growth (i.e. writing and responding to blog posts from colleagues around the world), Superintendents are valuing the different ways that Millennials build and develop relationships.

*Finding: A significant number of Principals and District administrators are promoted from within the District ranks.*

This finding does not suggest a singular practice that -if put in place- will lead to the results found in this study. Hiring from within is a practice that must be founded on a culture that builds leadership capacity. District A has found so much success hiring from within because the vision and mission of the Superintendent are deeply ingrained in the District's schools and staff. Current District leaders are able to provide significant and meaningful support because they have a profound understanding of the intended outcomes for the District. So, while the finding suggests that Superintendents can benefit by hiring from within the district's teaching and Principal ranks, a deeper change has to

take place first that leads to an organization where leaders are built from within.

Therefore, Superintendents should work toward building an organization that provides opportunity for and support to young or aspiring leaders.

*Finding: Principals and Superintendents identify that significant levels of autonomy are important for goal achievement.*

Superintendents who wish to properly support Millennial Principals should not only provide defined autonomy to Principals, but also communicate the level of autonomy that is allowed. When Principals know they have reign over site decisions, and that they will have the support of the Superintendent if the decision is innovative or unpopular, Principals will feel empowered and supported. Both of the Superintendents in this study provide high expectations to Principals. At the same time, they openly describe the level of autonomy they give to Principals.

I don't believe...everybody has to be 100% alike to accomplish their goals. As long as they have the outcome in mind and they're achieving the outcome, how they get there, as long as it's legal and not immoral, I don't care (SB).

Similarly, Superintendent A openly communicates the autonomy provided to Principals.

I think one thing that I would pride myself on is that I trust the leadership of our principals, I really do. I admire their leadership and as I tell them often, 'I'm not the principal, you are. So you take it, you go with it'" (SA).

Despite the small sample size in this study, the findings offer practicing and aspiring Superintendents concrete steps to take as they prepare for the influx of Millennial Principals that will invariably be hired in the coming years. By taking these

findings and recommendations and translating them into practices that will work for their District, Superintendents are practicing proactive and supportive leadership.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

A common saying tells us that the more we know, the more we realize we don't know. At the conclusion of this study, this saying has great meaning. The data from this study clearly indicate findings that address the research questions stated at the outset of this study, despite the lack of focus on instructional technology. That being the case, there are many avenues for future research that were uncovered over the course of the study.

Of the many supports that Principals value, chief among them was the level of support from District staff. This study did not examine the work of these District leaders, nor was their relationship with the Superintendent or Principals examined. Future researchers should examine the practices and relationships of District management, so that knowledge of what makes them successful in their supportive role can become research-based knowledge. Furthermore, the way that Superintendents monitor and support District management would be a useful strand of research, providing Superintendents with more research-proven practices.

A practice that was consistent in both Districts was the level of hiring from within the District for Principals and District leaders. Future researchers should study the practices that lead to successful hires from within. Again, Superintendents will benefit from knowing what factors and practices lead to the successful building of leadership capacity in school districts.

The literature used as a basis to describe the Millennial generation may benefit from updated profiles of Millennials, especially because there is an increase in the number of Millennials in the work force. As suggested in the findings of this study, Millennials may not be as aloof or deficient in building relationships as the literature suggests. Furthermore, future research may need to redefine the meaning of relationships, as seen by Millennials. This definition should include the electronic forms of communication and network building, since these two forms of communication are ubiquitous in the life of the Millennial.

As the number of Millennial Principals increases, future researchers may need to examine the relationships between Baby Boomer Principals and Millennial Principals. Throughout data collection, Millennial Principals expressed frustration with the disconnect between their practices and those of long tenured Principals. Principals in both of the studied Districts worked with other Principals to problem solve and share ideas. School and District leaders will benefit from a more thorough understanding of how these two generations operate together when in similar positions in the organization.

As stated above, one of the limitations of this study is the lack of diversity among the two Districts studied. Future research can further shed light on the ways Baby Boomer Superintendents support Millennial principals by studying larger populations. Furthermore, with the increase in the number of Millennial Principals, there may be opportunities to collect quantitative data from a large sample. A larger data set may shed light on the general perceptions and dispositions of Millennial Principals, compared to the lived experience of the participants in this study.

## **Concluding Statement**

This study set out to identify the leadership and support practices of Baby Boomer Superintendents who supervise Millennial Principals. The goal of this study was not only to identify those practices, but also to provide a context for the impending changes to school leadership caused by the generational shift among Principals. As the generational gap between Superintendents and Principals increases, the need for updated leadership practices will simultaneously increase in importance.

Any current or aspiring Superintendent will benefit from heeding the findings and recommended practices found in this study. Effective support of new Principals has a traceable affect on student outcomes, and therefore warrants the attention of district leaders.

Future researchers can also benefit from the finding and suggested avenues of inquiry suggested in this study. As the number of Millennial Principals increases, the amount of data related to their effective work will also increase, providing additional opportunities to add to the existing research on this emerging phenomenon.

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## APPENDIX A

### List of Symbols

SA	Superintendent A
SB	Superintendent B
DAPA	District A, Principal A
DAPB	District A, Principal B
DAPC	District A, Principal C
DBPA	District B, Principal A
DBPB	District B, Principal B

## APPENDIX B

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Principals

Tell me about your experience as an employee in this district. (i.e. length of service, other positions held)

Tell me a little about your school community (major initiatives, biggest challenges, most significant successes, etc.)

What processes do you use to develop goals for your school?

Are these goals tied to your own professional/evaluation goals?

Are these goals related to your district's goals?

Do any of your school goals include the use of instructional technology?

Is the superintendent involved in this process? If so, how?

What processes does your superintendent use to develop a vision and goals for the district?

To what degree do the current District goals incorporate instructional technology?

In what ways does the superintendent support you as you lead your school toward achieving its goals?

Tell me about the level of autonomy you feel you have in leading your school.

Are there areas in which you wish you had more autonomy?

## APPENDIX C

### Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Superintendent

Please tell me a bit about the past positions you held in the district.

Please describe your school district (enrollment, highlights, general organization, management structures).

Describe the process that you use for developing short term goals and the long term vision and goals for the District.

How do you articulate your goals to Principals?

How are you involved in the development of goals at the school site level?

To what degree are Principals involved in the development of their evaluation goals?

What is the process for monitoring goal process throughout the year?

What are the skills or dispositions needed as a Superintendent in order to support Principals as they work toward goal achievement?

From your perspective what are the emerging areas for use of technology in education?

How do you employ your Director of Technology to support Principals in the implementation of technology?

Do any of your district goals rely heavily on the use of technology?

What are the major challenges to implementing new technologies, and how do you address them?

Describe the level of autonomy Principals have in your District when it comes to achieving their school goals.

How do you balance innovative classroom ideas with conflicting board policies?

How does the generational gap affect the way you work with young principals?

What resources do Principals have at their disposal when trying new ideas at their school?

APPENDIX D  
Informed Consent Form  
**California State University, Northridge**  
**CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECT**

Minding the Gap: Baby Boomer Superintendents'  
Leadership and Support of Millennial Principals

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

**RESEARCH TEAM**

**Researcher:**

Jay Greenlinger, Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
(818) 618-2620  
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**Faculty Advisor:**

Dr. Jody Dunlap, Dissertation Committee Chair  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330

**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the leadership actions of successful California Superintendents of improving districts as they support millennial (born between 1975 and 1985) principals who are implementing emerging classroom technologies.

**SUBJECTS**

***Inclusion Requirements***

You are eligible to participate in this study if you are a Superintendent of an academically improving district who supervises at least one principal from the millennial generation, or if you are a millennial principal.

***Time Commitment***

This study will involve approximately one hour of your time.

## **PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur: there will be a one hour-long face to face interview with the researcher. The interview will be digitally recorded using a laptop and microphone. The interviews will take place either at the subjects place of work or a mutually agreed upon public location.

## **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

This study involves no more than minimal risk, however, there are possible discomforts associated with this study. The possible discomforts include discussing your working relationship with your supervisor. To address this possible risk, all names and identifying information will be removed from interview transcripts. Furthermore, participants will have the opportunity to review transcripts and omit any information they wish.

## **BENEFITS**

### ***Subject Benefits***

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study.

### ***Benefits to Others or Society***

The possible benefits in general include improving the practices of aspiring or current superintendents so that they can more effectively support principals.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

## **COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT**

### ***Compensation for Participation***

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research study.

### ***Costs***

There is no cost to you for participation in this study.

## **WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. **If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the researcher immediately.**

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

### ***Subject Identifiable Data***

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.

***Data Storage***

All research data, including audio recordings and interview transcriptions, will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected. Data will be backed up on a password-protected server.

***Data Access***

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

***Data Retention***

The researcher intends to keep the research data until the research is published and/or presented and then it will be destroyed. All audio files and transcriptions will be destroyed one year after the publication of this study.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you are unable to reach a member of the research team listed on the first page of the form and have general questions, or you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.

**Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

*I agree to participate in the study.*

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**Subject Signature**

---

**Date**

---

**Printed Name of Subject**

---

**Researcher Signature**

---

**Date**

Jay Greenlinger

**Printed Name of Research**