The Political Behavior and Strategic Advocacy of Missouri Public-School Superintendents

Nicole Watkins Gaulden

B.S.Ed., Central Missouri State University, 1998

M.L.A., Baker University, 2007

Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Education of Baker University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

_____*James Robins*_____

James Robins, Ed.D.
Major Advisor

_____*Denis Yoder*_____

Denis Yoder, Ed.D.

_____*Danica Fuimaono*_____

Danica Fuimaono, Ed.D.

Date Defended: November 15, 2022

Copyright

Abstract

Support for public education is diminishing. The political narrative around funding public schools has negatively impacted funding in Missouri in favor of school choice measures like charter school expansion, voucher systems, and virtual schools. As part of their leadership role, public-school superintendents in Missouri are tasked to advocate for policies and funding that support public schools. To understand the strategies used by Missouri public-school superintendents to advocate for policies and funding that support the school districts they lead, the study included eight public-school superintendents at various points in their careers. Each superintendent was representative of the eight Congressional districts in Missouri. The superintendents are informed about the politics of education in Missouri, and each of the eight participants employ direct advocacy measures with their state legislators. The two suburban school districts represented in the study found direct advocacy less effective than other means of advocacy. All participants leaned heavily on professional organizations to lobby and advocate for desirable policies and legislation that support funding public schools in Missouri. Data analysis revealed that the superintendents perceived their sphere of influence was more significant in the micropolitical arena. Data analysis also revealed that this influence was deeply seeded in the relationships superintendents have formed within the business community who can work as positive advocates for public schools. The relationship between the school and business communities is symbiotic and a powerful point of political pressure. The results of the study aligned with earlier literature on superintendents' political engagement and advocacy but found the participants more politically savvy and strategic in their advocacy work than expected. Implications for action and remarks on the future of advocacy are provided in the conclusion.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters and granddaughters and to every young woman who was told that she should not. They are ever the inspiration behind my work. I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, David, who has spent the better part of forty years watching me try to forge a path and educate myself. To my son, who has taught me more about what it means to be a teacher than anyone. To my students over the last twenty-five years, especially those in alternative education settings, I dedicate my life's work so that someday you will do what you think you cannot. I dedicate this to Danica Fuimaono, my cheerleader, throughout this endeavor. Finally, I dedicate this to my parents. First, to Dr. Robert Watkins, who was my first great teacher and who has made education his life's work. I do not remember a time when I was not in school at a game, a play, a concert, or learning with him next to me. It is without irony or metaphor that I say this work would not be finished without him. Lastly and never least, I dedicate this in loving memory of my mother, Donna Watkins, who I sometimes still hear say, "Go, girl."

Acknowledgements

        I would like to thank my professors at Baker University and those in my cohort who persevered through a pandemic to continue to make a difference in the lives of children and families. To Dr. James Robins, I am fortunate to have had you as my major advisor, and I thank you for your support and interest in my topic. Thank you to my research analyst, Dr. Li Chen-Bouck for your insight and tenacity in teaching me how to develop my research. Thank you to Dr. Denis Yoder and Dr. Danica Fuimaono for your time and investment in this research as members of my defense committee. Finally, thank you to my family, friends, and colleagues for listening when I thought I would not make it through. I am comforted by your kindness and support.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1

Introduction

Support for public schools is in decline. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, public education has volleyed a constant barrage of reform movements, legislative actions, and privatization efforts (Ravitch, 2016). These measures support school choice through voucher systems, homeschool education provisions, charter schools, and virtual schools that divert funding away from K-12 public education (xvii-xx). According to Fogarty (2011), advocates for public education lobby to preserve federal, state, and local tax dollars that support public schools where most students in the United States attend (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.).

The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) state that part of a superintendent's role is to advocate for policies and funding at local, state, and national levels that support the public school system (2015). This role is the one that superintendents find most tenuous and for which they feel most unprepared to execute (Irish, 2011). Nonetheless, the role is distinctively impactful in securing policies and funding supporting Missouri public schools.

Background

Historically, superintendents had the authority to execute local school policies made by a governing board of education (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2007). Since the Supreme Court's decision to desegregate schools (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954) and the development of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), public schools were, and are, regulated by the federal government; however, states carry the most significant burden of governance and funding.

According to Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000), school superintendent positions emerged in urban school districts in the mid-19th century. Outside the role of a schoolmaster, the school superintendent's primary purpose was to facilitate the management of schools and to function as a liaison between locally elected school boards and school personnel. In Missouri, the Constitution of 1865 established the office of county superintendents. In this position, superintendents were itinerated managers of multiple school districts within a county and oversaw the procurement of textbooks, contractual agreements with teachers, and general operations (Phillips, 1911).

Under the Revision Act of 1874, elected members of county Boards of Directors hired County Superintendents (Phillips, 1911). The Revision Act of 1874 established strict local control of school districts by county and gave superintendents the authority to act at the board's behest. The 20th century required schools to meet the demands of an industrialized economy and the battlefields of the First and Second World Wars. The Space Race of the 1950s and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s expanded the role of the federal government in public education and gave rise to the reform movement of the 1980s and 1990s (Casalaspi, 2017).

Public-school superintendents became managers of children and curriculum and multi-million-dollar budgets, technological infrastructures, hundreds of miles of transportation routes, special services, mental health providers, food distribution, and a plethora of other social justice issues (Casalaspi, 2017). Programs, accountability, and reform movements operate at the mercy of federal, state, and local tax revenues that are highly contentious in the political sphere where charter and private schools compete for public funding (Rhim, 2020).

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), public schools have been subject to a barrage of reform movements and legislative actions (Ravitch, 2016). In the past twenty years,

school accountability measures like *No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top*, and Every *Child Can Succeed Act* have provided a testing environment in which public school students in the United States were destined to fail (Ravitch, 2016). State legislatures, state departments of education, and school districts fall under a federal regulation that supports school choice (Ravitch, 2016). Education policies are made by political appointees and legislators, not public-school officials, or educators. These measures favor privatization of public-school funding, voucher systems, homeschools, virtual schools, and other means to divert funds away from K-12 education and are championed by both major American political parties (Ravitch, 2016).

Standard Six of The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) explicitly stated, "An education leader promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political social, economic, legal, and cultural context," (2008, p. 15). In Missouri, the Missouri Superintendent Standards, implemented in 2013, call for the same. Within the document, Standard 6 ("The Education System") and its Quality Indicators use the language, verbatim, of the ISLLC standard (DESE, 2013, p. 2).

Fogarty (2011) reported that Illinois school superintendents found ISLLC Standard 6 beneficial. Still, they were hesitant to be activists or party affiliates. This reluctance is not new. Young (2018) noted that superintendents were unlikely participants in politically engaged behaviors.

Young (2018) found that at local and internal levels, superintendents struggled to negotiate the varied political viewpoints that inform policy within their local districts, and superintendents appeared to rely on professional organizations to lead advocacy at state and national levels (Fogarty, 2011). Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) acknowledged that professional communities, media, and local stakeholders influence superintendents' leadership decisions.

Conversely, superintendents are community members and have significant access to and influence on internal policies (Irish, 2011).

Portion, featured in *The superintendent's field book: A guide for leaders of learning* (Harvey, Cambrom-McCabe, Cunningham, & Koff, 2013), identified micropolitical leadership as one of seven School Critical Functions and Associated Actions. According to Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014), the micropolitical arena is "one of the greatest challenges they face," (p.12). Local politics are as important and more pressing than esoteric national politics that demand reform and lean on the narrative of America's failing public schools (Hurst, 2017).

Large urban districts tend to engage in broader legislative advocacy, and small rural school districts tend to mediate district-level politics (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006). Whatever the public-school demographic, politics is an uneasy subject (Hurst, 2017). Still, the political advocacy roles of public-school superintendents reside in communities and in political spaces both large and small. With Missouri's 2021 charter school expansion legislation, public-school superintendents in the state have a more significant role as advocates to maintain funding and influence public education policies.

Statement of the Problem

For the past five decades, support for public schools has declined; however, public-school systems are part of the political discourse, and rhetorical arguments regarding the value of a public education require action to preserve the democratic principles of a literate and informed citizenry (Pineo-Jensen, 2013). In their 2000 study, Glass, et al. reported that public-school superintendents were historically apolitical school district executives, but Aleman (2002) recognized the political nature of education in the United States. While the public-school

superintendent's job is historically apolitical, the role has evolved to include advocacy work to garner the support of local, state, and federal policymakers (Case & King, 1985). The available research on public-school superintendents' experiences in strategic political advocacy is minimal and primarily focused on their perceptions of a myriad of political concerns, including funding, privatization, and board of education relations. There is little available research on the direct political advocacy that Missouri public-school superintendents do that specifically addresses school reform legislation.

Some reforms capitalize on privatization through legislative actions that divert funding to private and charter schools based on the precept that privatization creates a more efficient education system (Rhim, 2002). In Missouri, the first charter schools were approved through legislation in 2012 as school choice options for students who reside in the urban centers of Kansas City and St. Louis. In 2021, the Missouri state legislature approved charter school expansion to cities with populations over 30,000, and for the first time, a school choice scholarship program was also passed (HB349, 2021). This expansion threatened to reduce the amount of funding for Missouri public schools. A school superintendent's role as an advocate for public school funding in Missouri faces new challenges to secure money from federal and state sources in ways not yet understood through contemporary research.

According to Bjork, et al. (2014), superintendents reported their first concern is "financing schools" and public-school superintendents have a degree of influence over fiscal policy at the state level (Case & King, 1985). Despite this, available literature suggests that public-school superintendents are reticent to join in active political discourse and struggle to identify social justice concepts and democratic voice (Alsbury, 2006). In Missouri, the strategic advocacy work of public-school superintendents in rural and small suburban districts is not well

documented or understood; however, Adams (1992) found in Missouri "administrators, school board members and teachers" (p. 48) had the most influence on policy concerning schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the extent to which Missouri public-school superintendents participate in political advocacy to secure policies and funding that benefit students in the education systems they lead. The study explored the strategies superintendents use to advocate for legislative policies that secure funding that supports public education. Moreover, the study explored superintendents' self-reflective evaluations of their advocacy work. The study offered insight into their perceptions of political advocacy and the strategies used to secure necessary policies and funding that ensure student success in the public school system. The research was conducted when charter school expansion and school privatization legislation had moved outside of Missouri's urban centers in St. Louis and Kansas City.

Significance of the Study

The study will provide awareness and guidance for superintendents and other public-school leaders who advocate for public education policy. As a result of the study, superintendents may gain new insights into their roles and responsibilities as leaders and political advocates for such policies. Public education is guaranteed in the United States; therefore, superintendents, education leaders, legislators, teachers, parents, and communities could benefit from an analysis of educational advocacy resulting from the research. Additionally, the study can inform future school leaders of the impact of their advocacy work on funding sources and provide a compass to navigate political waters.

Public-school superintendents are uniquely placed within their school districts to present legislators with a broad view of their school districts' positive impacts on the community (Glass,

Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The organizational strength of a school district lies in its ability to meet accountability measures, provide social-emotional support and learning opportunities for students, and meet the immediate need to keep schools funded (Fogarty, 2011). This study will attempt to define the advocacy experiences of Missouri public-school superintendents in securing funding and resources to meet the demands of accountability and the needs of their students and communities. The study will explore the strategies participants use to advocate for policies and funding for public schools at local and state levels.

Delimitations

Lunenberg and Irby (2008) define delimitations as "self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study." The delimitations of this study pertained only to political advocacy roles Missouri superintendents assume to advocate for funding and policies that benefit their local districts. The political advocacy of superintendents included only direct engagement with Missouri legislators and other elected officials, including board of education members. The research included only Missouri public-school superintendents in each of the state's eight congressional districts representing Missouri voters during the 2021-2022 school year. Missouri congressional districts were redrawn by the state legislature in the 2022 legislative session (HB2909, 2022) and signed into law on May 18, 2022.

Assumptions

According to Lunenberg and Irby (2008), "Assumptions influence the entire research endeavor," and "provides a basis for formulating research questions or stating hypotheses for interpreting data….," (p. 135). For that purpose, the study of Missouri superintendents' experiences in their role as public school advocates includes the following assumptions: 1) superintendents will be forthcoming in their responses to interview questions; 2) superintendents

will be knowledgeable about their professional political advocacy roles, and 3) data collected through research interviews will accurately reflect superintendents' perceptions of their roles as political advocates for public-education policy and funding and the strategies they use to advocate.

Research Question

Qualitative research requires reflexive, open-ended questions that allow the researcher to discover and explore the attitudes and perceptions of the participants in a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In keeping with this, the research questions for this study were written to discover and explore the perceptions of Missouri school superintendents about their roles as politically engaged advocates for public school policy and funding. The research questions are as follows:

RQ: What are the experiences of public-school superintendents in Missouri in the process of advocating for policy and funding that support public education?

> Sub RQ1: What strategies do public-school superintendents in Missouri employ when advocating for policy and funding that support public education?
>
> Sub RQ2: How do public-school superintendents in Missouri execute each strategy when advocating for policy and funding that support public education?
>
> Sub RQ3: How do public-school superintendents in Missouri evaluate each strategy employed in advocating for policy and funding that support public education?

Definition of Terms

For clarity, the study provided operational definitions (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008) of terms pertinent to understanding political theory, advocacy, and funding for Missouri public schools.

Advocacy: Webster's College Dictionary defines advocacy as "The act of pleading for, supporting, or recommending a cause or course of action.

Charter Schools: Per the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), "Charter Schools are independent public schools that are free from some rules and regulations that apply to traditional public-school districts as specifically identified in charter school law. In exchange for flexibility, charter school sponsors are to hold the schools accountable for results. Charter schools are non-sectarian, do not discriminate in their admission policies, and may not charge tuition or fees."

Covid 19: Covid 19 is the standard terminology for the SARS-CO-V2 virus. This coronavirus, first identified in 2019, quickly spread around the globe and resulted in more than 600,000 deaths in the United States (CDC, 2021).

Foundation Formula: DESE provided the following explanation of its school funding formula:

> The Foundation Program, or the Foundation Formula, is Missouri's primary method of distributing money to public schools. Although school districts receive funding for different programs from various sources (local, state, and federal), the Foundation Formula is the primary source of essential state support for public schools. Created by state law, the formula is a complex mechanism based on factors including student attendance, local property tax rates, the proportion of students in a district who are disadvantaged or need special education, summer

school programs, and other considerations. Funds received through the

Foundation Formula must be used primarily to pay teachers' salaries in the school

district. This formula is defined in state law, Section 163.031, RSMo.

ISLLC Standard 8: Professional Standards for Educational Leaders Standard 8 states

explicitly that educational leaders will work in advocacy in the following ways (2015):

- 8f—Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement.
- 8h—Advocate for the school and district and for the importance of education and student needs and priorities to families and the community.
- 8i—Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community.

Liberalism: Webster's College Dictionary defined liberalism as "2. A political and social

philosophy advocating individual freedom, representational forms of government,

progress and reform, and protection of civil liberties."

Micropolitical Leadership: Micropolitical leaders are arbiters of special interests in

local or internal politics (Harvey, Cambrom-McCabe, Cunningham, & Koff, 2013).

Missouri Superintendent Standards: The prescribed evaluation standards for Missouri

School Superintendents were implemented in 2013.

Neoliberalism: Citing Davis (2014) and Phelan (2014), Phelan and Salter (2019) defined

neoliberalism as, "Conceived in simple definitional terms, we define it as a political and

discursive sensibility that privileges market and economic measures of value and which

also actively critiques political and ideological alternatives to market rationality," (p.

156).

Public School Open Enrollment Act: Effective July 1, 2023, Missouri Senate bill 1010 allows nonresident students in a public school district to enroll in another school district where parents own residential or agricultural real property and pay taxes relegated to public schools.

Scholarship Tax Credits: Ravitch (2016) defines vouchers as programs that "transfer public money to private and religious schools…." In Missouri, HB 349 of the 2021 legislative session passed the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program, an Education Savings Account (ESA). Parents can claim a tax credit of up to 50% of their student's education costs from their public schools in communities with a population larger than 30,000. (Christofinelli, 2021).

Organization of Study

Following the organizational guidelines of Lunenberg & Irby (2008), Chapter 1 provides an outline of the research questions, delimitations, assumptions, and essential terms for the reader. Chapter 2 serves as a comprehensive review of the literature for the study and presents historical and contemporary viewpoints on school funding, superintendent advocacy, and perceptive studies of superintendents in states outside of Missouri. As a qualitative dissertation, Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the study and research design. Chapter 4 presents the demographic data of eight Missouri school superintendents and analyzes their responses to the research questions. Chapter 5 concludes the research and provides the reader with recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

For decades, public school systems in the United States have been targets for reform. Since the 1950s, reform efforts have been championed by both political parties and are inextricably intertwined (Ravitch, 2016). Since *No Child Left Behind*, state legislatures have followed the national political platform that called for privatization and charter school expansion. Legislators relied on accountability measures to close or defund traditional public schools based on Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) accountability measures (Ravitch, 2016).

Policymakers, media pundits, and politicians contended that competitive, market-level forces would close low-performing schools and achievement gaps (Ravitch, 2016). Proponents of school reform and school choice maintained the current public funding system, and subsequent public policy initiatives created a bureaucratic minefield mired in inefficiency and waste (Merrifield, 2019). In an examination of this argument, Coffin (2020) wrote, "Choice-based competition would make schools accountable to consumer demand because parents could select the school that meets their preferences and leaves schools that fail to provide quality education," (p. 21). There is consistent, increased pressure for public school districts to perform at progressively on standardized tests while funding is tied to performance. At the helm of each public school district is a public-school superintendent whose leadership is evaluated through standards that require political advocacy at local, state, and national levels (ISLLC, 2008).

Traditionally, school leaders were encouraged to avoid legislative advocacy. Public school policy was the work of politicos and elected officials. In an 1886 article, "Politics and Pedagogy," teachers were cautioned against "…advocating and denouncing men who represent our ideas, or those to which we are opposed, of private discussion of the political movements of the hour," (*Journal of education,* 1886, p. 149). Advocacy work remains controversial. This literature review examines the historical role of a public-school superintendent in Missouri, the school reform movement, the advocacy of public-school superintendents, policies and funding that support public schools, and the unique political climate of Missouri.

Historical Context

Callahan's 1966 research, *The superintendent of schools: An historical analysis,* identified four distinct periods of change in the role of American superintendents: 1) Scholarly Educational Leader; 2) Business Executive; 3) Educational Statesman in Democratic Schools, and 4) Applied Social Scientist. In an article about Missouri public-school superintendents who served between 1865 and 1915, Karanovich and Morice (2009) wrote, "Missouri's educational leaders saw public schools as active partners in promoting an industrial economy," (p. 2) following the Civil War and brief Reconstruction period in the state. This industrialized education model refocused the role of a superintendent and required greater business acumen and professionalism (Karaonovich & Morice, 2009). This assessment aligned with Callahan's research that illustrated a notable change in leadership philosophy that lasted through the 1920s. Callahan (1966) asserted that this managerial-type leadership met the demands of the modern industrialized society.

In the shift toward democratic leadership, Bjork, Kowalski, & Browne-Ferrigno (2014) cited Howlett (1993) and stated that public-school superintendents "rested on their capacity to

galvanize support of school board members, citizens, parents, and employees for district initiatives," and mitigate interest group political pressure (p. 454).

The 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, led to desegregation lawsuits in Missouri's largest metropolitan areas, Kansas City and St. Louis, in the 1970s and lasted more than forty years. These lawsuits cost the state just under $3 billion (Ponessa, 1998). As landmark legislative mandates like PL-142 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 enhanced the role of the federal government in public education, the role of a public-school superintendent changed as well. Through the latter part of the 20th century, public-school superintendents were challenged repeatedly to meet federal mandates and school reform efforts (Bjork, et al., 2014).

Public Education Policy and School Reform

The push for voucher systems in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush eras (Ravitch, 2016) was a response to *A Nation at Risk* that detailed the failures of American public schools (Harvey et al., 2013). At the outset, the report sounded the alarm that the nation's lack of academic achievement was nothing less than an existential threat to the American way of life. The Commission asserted, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," (1983, p. 6). This seminal study by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 was foundational to every education study; however, it was not the first call for reform or school choice. Academics cited Milton Friedman's (1955) position that school choice and reduction in federal regulation of public schools would provide families the opportunity to receive subsidies to attend private and for-profit schools (Cook, 2019). Saltman (1999) also cited Friedman and stated, "He compared public education to profit-driven industries and suggested

that injecting an element of competition into public education would drive up quality by making schools compete for students," (p. 10).

With increasing pressure to improve standardized test scores, in the 1990s, school superintendents across the country worked to assure students of all ability levels were achieving high proficiency levels prescribed by sets of learning standards. The most significant of these new reform efforts came with *No Child Left Behind* in 2001. Because federal education policy sets state-level policy, administrators at every level advocated for resources, funding, and policies promoting public education (Blanden, 1998). Policymakers pushed for systemic change and picked up the mantle of voucher systems and business-model charter schools as a mechanism by which to achieve greater student success under the Obama Administration's reform effort, *Race to the Top* (RTTT) (Woods, 2017). The RTTT legislation returned a modicum of control to state legislatures (Rooks, 2017); however, schools in Missouri had a reckoning. Public school officials and legislators alike had to address deficiencies in reading and math as well as their understanding of diversity within their school communities (Rooks, 2017).

In *Cutting school: The segrenomics of American education*, Rooks (2017) cited the 2013 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. She noted that the Normandy School District, the district Brown graduated from, had lost accreditation in 2012. School districts in both St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri, suffered the effects of segregated schools and the impact of decades of desegregation lawsuits in federal court (Rooks, 2017). Parents scrambled to get their students into accredited schools (Rooks, 2017). Of the socioeconomic and racial pressures in Missouri, she wrote, "Indeed, what these tensions are all about—race, money, housing, and economic inequality—have long defined Black education," (p. 107).

The battle for equity and choice is fought continually in the state legislature. This research is time-stamped by two historical events in 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic and the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The Black Lives Matter movement began in Ferguson, Missouri in 2013 following the death of Michael Brown. The pandemic shuttered schools in March 2020 and left many students across the state and across the country without access to an education. As a response to community outrage, lack of equitable access to broadband and reliable technology, and systemic racial disparities in the education system, the Missouri Legislature passed an education omnibus bill that would "allow charter schools to operate in any city or county with a population greater than 30,000," (MOSB55, 2021, p. 9). The bill required school districts to pay charter schools that for pupils within the public school district. The amount paid by a public school district to a charter school was determined through a complicated formula. This formula calculated the public school's average weighted daily attendance and state adequacy targets to decide real dollar amounts owed to the charter school for a student's education (MOSB55, 2021, Section 160.415).

The chief complaint among public school administrators was that charter schools, which receive public funding, are not accountable to performance standards that inform accreditation in the same way public schools are (Cook, 2015). Furthermore, charter schools do not show they meet any accountability standards or that they are more efficient by any measure than traditional public schools (Blissett, 2017). This complaint was in direct contrast to what many Missouri legislators perceived to be the case (Woods, 2017).

In 2021, a good deal of attention was paid to non-existent curricula, and it created local contention that resulted in legislative action. House Bill 952 prohibited teaching, in whole or in part, the *New York Times* 1619 Project (2021), which was passed as an amendment to HB 1141

(Millitzer, 2021). Given the time and the sensitivity of these bills, the nature of reform, and the political environment in which superintendents across the country find themselves, it bears asking superintendents how their advocacy roles are changed and the political strategies they employ to meet the demands of the time.

Politics of Education

Irish (2011) found that controversial and sensitive issues (CSI) "lack a cogent conceptual framework," (p. ii). Irish examined the theoretical frameworks that were in place to support superintendents' engagement in policymaking for curricula and board policy. Irish posited both created a political environment in which, "School administrators occupy a compelling position in education—the intersection of policy, school relations, and social reform," (2011, p. 29). The study was conducted in Alberta, Canada, and created a theoretical framework steeped in critical democratic theory in public education and presented neoliberalism as an ideology that, "…imposes norms as externally defined standards in a prescriptive way," (Irish, 2011, p. 5). Superintendents in Canada and the United States have faced similar problems. Liberal legislation and standards like Social-Emotional Learning and Trauma-Informed Schools challenged the neoliberal, prescriptive standards of NCLB, RTTT, and ECCSA.

The power to make and decide curricula, even that which is controversial, does not rest solely with any institution or authority figure but with stakeholders, including students, if it is to be inclusive (Irish, 2011). The discussions of diversity and inclusion are delicate for all stakeholders. Irish found teachers more fearful of repercussions such as disciplinary action for their political engagement than superintendents (Irish, 2011). Despite their fear of making public their private preferences at the ballot box, superintendents have greater power to work outside

neoliberal constraints of school policy to create or use controversial curricula than building-level

leaders and teachers (Irish, 2011).

Missouri's most recent response to controversial curricula came in the passage of HB 952

(2021). It prohibited the use of controversial curricula and *The 1619 Project* specifically. The bill

states:

> No state agency, school district, charter school, online instruction funded in any manner
>
> by the Missouri legislature, or personnel or agent of such state agency, school district,
>
> charter school, or online instruction shall teach, use, or provide for use by any pupil any
>
> curriculum, instructional materials, or assignments designed to teach components of
>
> critical race theory as part of any curriculum, course syllabi, or instruction
>
> in any course or program of study. If the state board of education determines that a
>
> publicly funded local education agency or online program of instruction has violated this
>
> section, the state board shall notify the entity of its violation (HB952, 2021).

Aleman (2002) noted in a case study that included the president of a local NAACP chapter who,

"…described the superintendent as political, nonpartisan, and aligned with the local power

elites," (p. 297). Platforms like those of school superintendents are non-partisan, but execution of

a means to achieve goals is fraught in the micropolitical sphere of local school governance.

Aleman (2002) noted the stance of a local newspaper editor and stated, "According to him,

partisanship and the superintendency did not ultimately matter. What mattered most were the

results of the superintendency," (p. 297).

Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) noted that the literature suggested superintendents are

more interested in serving the districts they lead and prefer having the ability to push forward

instructional initiatives rather than enter the political fray. As a result, advocacy organizations

without expertise in theoretical instructional practice or the operational reality of school leadership sell reform (Malin & Lubienski, 2015). Alsbury & Whitaker (2006) found that superintendents focus was on doing what has been best for students, and Malin & Lubienski (2015) noted that experts do not make policy--special interest groups do. They stated there is a "Tenuous and politicized link between research and policymaking in education," (Malin & Lubienski, 2015, p. 3).

Experts are "often far removed from the popular and policy conversations," (Aleman, p. 15). Brewer et al. (2015) acknowledged the problematic nature of mass opinion because it is not a particularly informed opinion. These inexpert opinions create the narrative of failing public schools (Malin & Lubienski, 2015). Brewer et al. wrote, "The concept of figured worlds directs attention to how situations and the people in them are products of history and the ways they are thoroughly intersubjective in their practice," (2016, p. 338). The context of time and history creates a need for leadership that is specific to time and place.

Meyers (2013) stated, "The values that received the most attention were efficiency and quality," (p. 262). Policymaking "…is a process that is both social and political," (Meyers, 2013, p. 267). Superintendents in the Alsbury & Whitaker study revealed their concern for corruptive practices of a patronage system at local levels (2015). Malin and Lubienski (2015) found that educational experts and researchers do not effectively engage with wider audiences. They found that large-scale media penetration was incentivized for professional advocates who are not educational researchers or experts in the field. Malin and Lubienski (2015) identified professional advocacy organizations such as the CATO Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Economic Policy Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute are the best equipped to penetrate various forms of media (Malin & Lubienski, 2015). Their findings indicated that those

with "expertise on social issues are often far removed from the popular and policy conversations on these issues," (Malin & Lubienski, 2015, p. 15). They advise academic researchers "to devote a greater share of their attention on the art of communication via traditional and new media," (Malin & Lubienski, 2015, p. 15). Aleman (2002) wrote, "The mass media exacerbate the situation for public school leaders, particularly for the urban superintendent, when they report to the public on poor academic performance of students in urban public schools," (p. 7). Public-school superintendents lack the media savvy to effect real change.

McCarthy (2011) did a case study of three Massachusetts superintendents. To transform education to meet the global education goals of achievement, "Superintendents recommended starting with school boards as well as including all stakeholders in the transformation process--," (p. 79). Additionally, McCarthy (2011) found, "Most superintendents said they were motivated by a deep commitment to equity, social justice, and a belief in students' ability to learn," (p. 80) and must communicate their commitment to mitigate resistance to change. Aleman cited John Portz's (2000) position that this commitment to local districts and the policies and politics, therein, shifted based on the political calculations of local politicians. He wrote, "From an economic perspective, public school education is big business," (p.10).

Bjork (2001) acknowledged that superintendents are not immune to the pressure of special interest groups at the district level. Citing McCarty & Ramsey (1971), these groups, Bjork wrote, "coalesce around economic, religious, racial or ethnic concerns and challenge education board policy…" (p. 280). Case & King (1985) found that these special interests, or community expectations, shape superintendent behavior; however, the changing nature and increased scrutiny of public education have intensified superintendents' role as political statesmen (Hurst, 2017).

Case and King (1985) analyzed the political behavior of superintendents in New Mexico. They divided political behaviors into four categories: "Issue Definition/Proposal Formulation; Support Mobilization; Individual Political Activity; and Specific Fiscal Issues," (p. 7). They found that superintendents in larger and more diverse communities are more politically active than their rural counterparts, and that they are less reliant on professional organizations like the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) to do advocacy work. Furthermore, they reported that politically active superintendents are most likely to advocate for support mobilization than specific fiscal issues (Malin & Lubjenski, 2015).

Funding Schools

Federal funding of America's public schools under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was first passed in 1965 and comprised just over one-third of education funding (US Department of Education, 2005). To combat childhood poverty, Title I of ESEA provided monies specifically for public education, and Titles II and III provided monies for both public and private schools for state purchases of textbooks and other instructional materials for students (Casalaspi, 2017). The remaining school funding was the purview of the states (US Department of Education, 2005).

Equity in education was central to President Johnson's education platform. On the heels of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, ESEA was designed to address childhood poverty and provide a pathway to achieve The American Dream (Casalaspi, 2017). Coupled with President Truman's 1946 National Free/Reduced Lunch program (Tonn, 2006), federal legislation was in place to support Johnson's Great Society (Casalaspi, 2017). The enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1975 further increased federal funding for public schools and solidified a system of federalist education (Casalaspi, 2017). Like ESEA, the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) required more inclusivity, and monies were specifically earmarked for public schools (US Department of Education, 2005). Despite the efforts of policymakers and legislators in Washington D.C., the contemporary school-choice movement has taken direct aim at the perceived inefficiency of traditional public schools mandated to comply with all ESEA (HR 2362) provisions, and urban public-school districts are in the crosshairs (Rooks, 2017).

Under the George W. Bush administration, NCLB, an iteration of ESEA, applied high-stakes testing and performance standards as a measure of a school's Adequate Yearly Progress (Young, 2018). Schools that failed to meet satisfactory progress received a reduced dollar amount in federal funding (Cook, 2019), and in Missouri, this reduction translated into the loss of accreditation of both Kansas City and St. Louis public schools (Rooks, 2017). After decades of desegregation lawsuits, development of magnet school programs, bussing and school closings, charter schools emerged in Missouri under the auspices of equity for urban school children (Cook, 2015). One explanation suggested that politicians' concerns over the state of urban public schools are primarily motivated by economic factors and political self-interest (Aleman, 2002).

Taking up the mantle of equity, Missouri became the 27th state to allow charter schools, which are defined as "autonomous public schools, which receive the same funding from the same sources as other public schools" (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). Universities in Missouri maintain sponsorships of charter schools in the state. These schools benefit from public funding but are not required oversight of an elected Board of Education (Blissett, 2017). The funding follows students from traditional public schools to their selected charter schools.

In Missouri, schools are funded based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and include monies based on state, county, and city government-assessed valuations of real property. House Bill No. 2002 appropriated $8,530,433,585 for the 2020-2021 school year for public and charter schools.

Bill Totals:

General Revenue Fund. $3,537,751,617

Federal Funds. $3,374,984,074

Other Funds $1,617,697,894

Total $8,530,433,585

Section 2016 itemized $208,443,000 from the Federal Emergency Relief Fund provided by the federal government under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act and $2,000,0000,000 from the Federal Stimulus Fund.

In Missouri, HB 349 (Christofanelli) passed in the 2021 legislative session. The bill provided for a 100% tax credit for the Educational Assistance Organization. In a legislative update, the Missouri School Boards Association (MSBA) reported, "The EAO issues scholarships to students who live in Clay, Jackson, Jefferson, St. Charles and St. Louis counties or any city with a population of more than 30,000 to attend a home, private, virtual or public school," (MOPTA.org, 2021, p. 7)**.** Advocacy organizations like MSBA, Missouri National Education Association (MNEA), and Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA) focused on the reduction of state funding for public schools and called for school administrators to engage directly with lawmakers to secure and maintain funding (MASA, 2021).

Blissett's (2017) study, "marked the 25th anniversary of charter schools in the United States," (p. 3). He reported, "The Clinton administration included a charter school grand program

in the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)…" (p. 10) and NCLB included charter schools as a remedy for failing schools. Charter schools have gained support through five presidential administrations as a choice for parents of school-age children, and they come without the private school price tag. Furthermore, Blissett posited, "Many definitional justifications for school choice rely on the argument that families are best and most morally fit to choose the educational paths for their children," (p. 12). Charter schools and vouchers provide greater competition for resources and funding that will spur public education to perform better (Merrifield, 2019).

Oakley recognized superintendents' need to provide necessary resources for students and suggested, "First, superintendents should become active in professional organizations or other groups that provide access to legislatures," (2017, p. 9). Oakley (2017), Case & King (1985), and Fogerty (2011) recognized that superintendents could influence education policy because the role of a superintendent is influential, but they feel more comfortable using that influence to direct local boards of education policy than legislative policy. Case and King (1985) found, "Less politically active superintendents appear to rely more heavily on associations than do their more active counterparts," (p. 14).

Public education is a consistent political target and is reflected in the policy choices of state legislatures and bureaucracies (Meyers, 2013). Contrary to literature found during the accountability era of school reform, Shields (2017) conducted a case study of midwestern superintendents and found that accountability measures such as test scores were not high on senior-level administrators' lists of immediate concerns. The superintendents' focus was on providing equity in resources for all students and inclusive policies at the district level (Shields, 2017).

Conversely, Bredeson & Kose (2007) found, "Attending to the budget and school finances (annual operating funds) dominates the top ranking for each survey in both time and importance," (p. 9). Fogarty (2011) stated, "Politics is the process of deciding how resources are allocated," (p. 31), and funding is part of the political process. Furthermore, Fogarty (2011) concluded that superintendents must engage with legislators to lobby and educate them on policies and funding to provide the programs and services necessary for student learning.

Superintendent Perceptions of Advocacy and Strategic Policymaking

Since the mid-20th century, education policy has encouraged and demanded political action of superintendents and other education professionals. Bjork and Keedy (2001) wrote, "The democratic foundation of public education in the United States ensures a political underpinning for nearly all activity in and around public schools," (p. 276). With each educational policy reform, restrictions on funding are increasingly political and come packaged in the name of accountability.

Under NCLB (2001), superintendents, and their faculties felt pressured to close achievement gaps through a gamut of high-stakes testing. Bredeson & Kose (2007) reported, "Superintendents gave state curriculum/testing mandates the most influential mean rank and second highest percentage of most influential top category votes [31.3%]," (p. 14). The Bredeson & Kose study echoed findings in the comprehensive research of Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) in, *The Study of the American School Superintendency 2000: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium* and the subsequent report, *The State of the American School Superintendence: A Mid-Decade Study* (Glass, Franceschini, 2007).

Both studies, conducted by the AASA, were national surveys of superintendents' perceptions of their role, demographic characteristics, perceived effectiveness, personal

satisfaction, and professional development needs. Superintendents reported high-stress levels related to increased accountability and student performance on high-stakes testing; however, much of their focus was on building interpersonal relationships (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Political advocacy ranked low in a list of superintendent concerns (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000).

In *The political sophistication of district transforming superintendents*, Aleman (2002) conducted a comprehensive case study of two urban superintendents to gauge their level of "political sophistication." Aleman (2002) acknowledged that the political engagement and advocacy roles of public leaders are expected. It is "firmly rooted in the history of American public education and has been documented by education leadership researchers," (p. 64). Aleman (2002) revealed that the research in educational leadership is not "anchored in political science literature," (p. vii).

One superintendent in the study, "avoided any appearance of overt political behavior entirely," (Aleman, 2002, p. 296). Aleman's findings are not outliers. The pressure to perform complicates advocacy roles, particularly in politically divided communities. Hurst (2017) studied the changing nature of political engagement through superintendents' participation on social media networks to reach out to or comment to state legislators. Whether strategic political behaviors are overt or covert, political sophistication and engagement are steeped in experience, knowledge, preparation, and place (Aleman, 2002).

Part of the requisite political sophistication has been identified in the performance expectations of a school leader that are outlined in six standards written by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Standard 6 specifically addressed the promotion of student success through political, social, economic, legal, and cultural action (2008). Since the

adoption of the ISLLC standards in 1996, the National Policy Board for Education

Administration, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015), Standard 2D

required school leaders to "Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom

and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity," (p. 14) as part of its ethical

practices. Promoting social justice and equitable funding was a significant task according to

these standards.

In his book, *Politics in education*, Saltman cites Gramsci's view that "education is

inherently political," (2018, p. 38). To meet the demands of accountability and advocacy, the

National Policy Board for Educational Administration revised the ISLLC standards for school

superintendents and other school leaders in 2015. While the standards focus on student learning,

the political advocacy standards remain.

Bjork & Keedy (2001) stated that because of the complex nature of reform policies,

members of boards of education and superintendents are "pivotal actors in reforming public

schools," (pp. 275-276). Stralek (2018) found that among these complexities, there is no single

contributing factor that impacts student performance. To further complicate matters, strategies of

influence by superintendents upon legislators, historically, were viewed unfavorably by boards

of education and state legislators (Chojnacki, 1992).

Maldanado (2007) defined political activity "as recruiting a legislative candidate,

supporting a legislative candidate and contacting a legislator," (p. 54). Most superintendents in

the study "reported that they contacted a legislator," (Maldanado, 2007, p. 55), but the

delineation between the role of a superintendent and the role of a state legislator was increasingly

difficult. The support for political activity lacks consensus between boards of education and

public-school superintendents (Knapke, 1986). Increasingly, the role of a superintendent in every

professional arena is fraught. Bjork et al. (2014) wrote, "Continuous conflict among interest groups and contentious politics are redefining superintendents' work," (p. 458).

Problematic Public Discourse

The consternation superintendents feel is endemic. The right-leaning principles cloaked in school choice advocacy and the left-leaning accountability advocacy rarely find common ground because they compete for the same funding (Blissett, 2017). Furthermore, the political discourse may extend beyond traditional political party lines (Woods, 2017). The media, local stakeholders, and ranking politicians at the state and national levels use local-level data to strengthen their causes for reform and funding from state and federal sources. Parents and other school and community stakeholders are less divided along party lines than professional politicians and advocacy groups, and larger, urban school districts have a greater capacity to encourage political engagement (Knapke, 1986).

As for accountability, Brewer, Knoeppel & Lindle (2015) found that respondents reported a lower perceived value in state standardized testing than media and pundits led audiences to believe. Reliance on the authority of state-level accountability measures like high-stakes testing was perceived more optimistically in non-White communities with higher poverty than in neighboring suburban school districts (Brewer, et al., 2015). Still, populations across the demographic spectrum are distrustful of the system (Knapke, 1986). The marketed goal to close achievement gaps, promote social justice (through accountability measures like NCLB, Race to the Top, Every Child Can Learn Act), and the legislative actions and executive orders that followed these measures were not apparent to most stakeholders (Brewer, et al., 2015). Brewer et al. concluded that the public needs considerable and constant reminders of the importance of accountability measures (2015).

The studies by Brewer et al. (2015) and Blissett (2017) were done in Southern states: South Carolina and Tennessee, respectively. Missouri, while not always considered regionally Southern, held many of the same political attitudes as neighboring Tennessee. Missouri cities shared the same complicated organizational problems as Chicago, Detroit, and Philadelphia, to name a few (Rooks, 2017). In Missouri, there was a push for school choice and competitive market-centered legislative action to expand charter schools outside of large urban districts (Blissett, 2017).

Encouraged by the charter school and voucher program reform movements, the Missouri legislature consistently drafts bills that divert public funding away from public schools, "Because the education article of the Missouri Constitution contains neither an 'adequacy' requirement nor a mandate to equalize funding…," (Rowe, 2010, p. 1054). Bills like SB55 (2021) are combined to include language that not only expands charter schools but provides for private school vouchers, and neo-voucher scholarships, and an open enrollment program for students who want to attend neighboring accredited public schools. Missouri public-school superintendents disapprove of charter school expansion but are more open to national accountability standards than Missouri state legislators (Woods, 2017).

The legislative rhetoric in Missouri was grounded in ideologies distilled into memorable and straightforward phrases like, "Charter schools are public schools," (Stacy, 2020, personal interview). Funding for charters and vouchers reduces funding for public schools and is confused by identity politics and propagated through polarized ideology (Blissett, 2017). Bjork and Keedy (2001) found, "Scholars and practitioners concur that if superintendents are to survive in these circumstances, they will need greater political acuity…," (p. 297). Because of the combative nature of political discourse, new superintendents feel unprepared in their

advocacy roles and are heavily influenced by their boards of education (Case & King, 1985). It is in this micropolitical arena where superintendents feel most equipped to advocate for school policies that follow federal mandates, state accountability measures, and social justice policies that meet the needs of their districts' students (Hurst, 2017). Fogarty (2011) stated, "Maintaining and continuing to develop effective communication practices with the board is an imperative responsibility of the superintendent," (p. 8).

Nonetheless, attitudes of stakeholders are shaped by media and other outlets of public discourse. Blissett (2017) addressed the dissonance of language, ideology, and perception of public schools and wrote, "…public interest in charter schools has been a consistent target of inquiry for those seeking to gauge Americans' views toward public education," (p. 53). Amid the current political environment that calls for transparency, the role of the superintendent is opaque.

Writers like Ravitch and Rooks denounced charter schools and vouchers as systems that disrupt not only funding but threaten any likelihood of achieving social justice (Ravitch, 2020 & Rooks, 2017). The language itself is highly charged and emotive, but Harvey et al. (2013) reminds school leaders that public schools belong to the public and public support of schools is the result of public engagement. Additionally, they cautioned school leaders, "The media is a wild card," (p. 273). Perception is everything.

Harvey, et al. (2013) noted Rotberg's opinion that, "Our rhetoric assumed test-score rankings are linked to a country's competitiveness," and led to "irrelevant policies," of intervention (p. 319). Glass and Franceschini (2007) found, "public schools have borne the brunt of numerous negative political efforts to 'reform,'" (p. 33). They found that superintendents perceived the most critical aspect of their jobs and the greatest need in their professional development was interpersonal relationships. Superintendents are more tied to their

communities, personnel, and students than any political or reform movement (Alsbury &

Whitaker, 2006).

Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) found, "School districts are affected by the communities in

which they reside," (p. 158). The research by Alsbury and Whitaker (2006) took on a more

forceful and urgent call. In 2006 Alsbury and Whitaker found that superintendents wavered in

their feelings about the intrusive nature of NCLB. They wrote, "Superintendents articulated the

dilemmas and difficulties of trying to figure out ethically and morally what was in students' best

interests," (p. 164).

Fullan (2003) addressed building-level leadership in his book, *The moral imperative of*

school leadership. He reminded leaders to consistently evaluate the big picture and be mindful of

the impact of decisions on the larger school community. Societal change begins with minor

changes that encourage trust in system processes and people (Fullan, 2003). The moral and social

imperatives transcend job titles. Ackoff and Rovin (2003) acknowledged this and defined

omnicompetence as, "the ability to obtain anything one needs and legitimately desires," (p. 165).

The authors differentiate between "power-over" and "power-to" (p. 166). The power to lead

rather than manage in a democratic system plays out in a school leader's willingness to engage in

politics. Conventional wisdom states that all politics are local, but the politics of a superintendent

are relational.

Summary

While superintendents increasingly feel the pressure of ever-expanding definitions of

their role, (Glass, Bjork, et al., 2000), Alsbury & Whitaker (2006) stated, "The reality is that

public schools are a foundation of our democracy and are expected to instill civic and social

attitudes and skills that shape how graduates lead their lives in communities," (p. 158). To that

end, Blissett (2017) acknowledged that "communities are built around schools," (p. 27), but perceptual roadblocks exist. Not only are superintendents not particularly media savvy, but Meyers (2013) found, "state policymakers distrust school professionals," (pp. 267-268) and that policymaking was not ruled by rational thought but by political expediency.

The research is best characterized by the divide between policymaker values and those whose role it is to carry out policies (Meyers, 2013). Outlining the rhetorical position that schools prepare the workforce, McCarthy (2011) stated, "According to global education proponents, students in K-12 schools need to be prepared to compete in the 21st-century global economy," (p. 21); however, Rhim (2002) acknowledged, "This research provides little insight into school-level practices that influence these important outcomes," (p. 2). Furthermore, student gains in charter schools like Edison and Advantage schools are mixed despite their expansion. This is frequently the case whether students are enrolled in charter schools, private schools, or public schools: Outcomes do not reflect expectations of student success (Meyers, 2013).

The significance of the divide between policymakers and school administration came to light after March 2020. Every stakeholder in education and media pundit had something to say about how to best educate children through the last quarter of the 2019-2020 school year and the whole of the 2020-2021 school year because of the closure of schools across the country and pivot to virtual instruction during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, Asbury and Whitaker's assertion that while superintendents supported stakeholder input, they, "Jealously guarded the separation of roles between federal and state mandates and local control as well as maintaining role distinctions between school experts and community patrons," (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2006, p. 165), and superintendents' understanding of social justice was encapsulated in "doing what's best for students," (pp. 164-165).

Whether the politics of education are at the local, state, or national level, research supports the notion that public-school superintendents are overburdened (Glass, et al., 2000) and school administrators primarily view the partisan political discourse as interchangeable (Ravitch, 2016). Literature suggests public-school superintendents are ill-prepared to lead outside of the communities they serve (Bjork & Keedy, 2001). Aleman (2002) concluded, "There is the explicit need for educational leadership programs to emphasize the study of politics and the political nature of the superintendency" (p. 320).

Communities and elected boards of education exert exigent pressure that creates a focal point in the micropolitical landscape of school leadership. Politicians and pundits push for further reform and accountability measures threatening funding and superintendents' power over legislative action. How Missouri superintendents prepare to respond remains to be seen.

Chapter 3

This study was conducted to explore the political behaviors and advocacy strategies employed by Missouri public-school superintendents. This chapter contains an overview of the study's research design, sampling procedures, instruments used, and data collection procedures. This chapter also includes data analysis, synthesis of data, and trustworthiness. The chapter also explains the researcher's role and the limitations of the study.

Research Design

The research for this study was a phenomenological qualitative design. Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) identified phenomenological research as a method used to investigate and understand "the core essence of human experience or phenomena as described by research participants," (p. 54). This study explored the experiences, political behaviors, and advocacy strategies used by Missouri public-school superintendents who work to secure legislative policies and funding that benefit Missouri public schools.

Setting

The study was conducted in eight Missouri public school districts. Each public school district was representative of one of Missouri's eight congressional districts and was situated in mostly rural areas. Larger urban and suburban school districts represented the two smallest geographic Congressional districts in Missouri. All districts were impacted by the passing of charter school expansion legislation (MO HB349/SB55, 2021). Each participant in the study was a Missouri public-school superintendent.

Demographic political data of each community was collected to provide a backdrop to understand the school district community, its representative congressional district, and Missouri

State Senate district, as well as racial demographics for each community (Table 1). Each

community was given alphabetical designations (e.g., Community A, Community B, etc.).

Table 1

Demographic Political Data of Selected Missouri Communities

Community	Congressional District	Missouri State Senate District	Race/Ethnicity Reported % of Community Population				
			W	*B*	*H*	*A*	*Two or More*
A	8	25	82.5%	9.6%	2.5%	1.9%	4.7%
B	6	12	78.6%	5.8%	7.3%	n/a	n/a
C	5	8	45.6%	44.4%	n/a	n/a	5%
D	1	14	78%	n/a	6.2%	n/a	7.8%
E	7	28	75%	n/a	3.5%	14.3%	n/a
F	2 & 3	2	73.2%	15.6%	n/a	n/a	5%
G	3	6	73.7%	14.3%	n/a	n/a	5%
H	4	21	51.4%	32.3%	7.7%	n/a	n/a

*Not*e. W = White; B = Black; H = Hispanic; A = Asian; Two or More = Multi-racial; n/a = No

available for racial/ethnic category. Adapted from *Statistical Atlas* https://statisticalatlas.com/

state/Missouri/Overview. Retrieved August 1, 2022.

The student statistics of each school district's student population and per-student funding

is represented to provide a fuller picture of the school community (Table 2). Each school district

was given a corresponding alphabetical designation (e.g., District A, District B, etc.).

Table 2

Student Statistics of Selected School Districts

School district	Free and reduced lunch eligible	Per-student funding (2020-2021)	4-year graduation rate	% of students in attendance at least 90% of the time
A	72.1%	$ 9,535	88.8%	75%
B	37.6%	$11,159	95.3%	90.8%
C	10.6%	$10,162	100%	96.8%
D	99.5%	$16,316	80.5%	78.9%
E	40.2%	$ 9,361	89.0%	87.6%
F	15.5%	$112,594	93.9%	86.7%
G	46.7%	$ 9,628	93.4%	83.9%
H	39.3%	$10,914	89.3%	88.1%

Note: Adapted from Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education Student Statistics of Selected School Districts. (n.d.). *Student Statistics*. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Visualizations.aspx?id=22.

Sampling Procedures

The population of the study was current public-school superintendents in Missouri. In Missouri, there are 515 public-school superintendents (DESE, 2021) and school districts range from fewer than 50 students to more than 20,000 students (MSBA, 2021). Among the population, criterion sampling method was used to select participants for the study. The criteria for participant selection were geopolitical, and each school district was representative of each of

Missouri's eight congressional districts. The study participants were a purposive sample "in keeping with qualitative research's emphasis on in-depth description of participants' perspectives and context," (Lunenberg & Irby, 2008, p. 177). This sampling process also ensured that each Missouri geopolitical region was represented in the study. From Missouri's public-school superintendent population, eight were selected for the study.

Table 3

Demographics of study participants

School district	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years in Current Position	Highest Degree of Education
A	M	W	11	EdD
B	F	W	16	EdD
C	F	W	2.5	EdS
D	F	B	6	PhD
E	M	W	1	EdD
F	M	W	37	EdD
G	M	W	14	EdS
H	M	W	3	EdD

Note: W = White; B = Black; H = Hispanic; A = Asian; Two or More = Multi-racial

Instruments

      The researcher collected data using interviews to explore the political behaviors and strategies Missouri public-school superintendents use when advocating for legislative policies and funding that support public education in Missouri. Interviews, according to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) provide an opportunity for rich, descriptive data that offers insight in each subject's "perspective of an event of experience," (p. 193).

      Interview Protocol. The researcher developed five open-ended interview questions based on the literature review regarding public-school administrators' engagement in advocacy work and their perceptions of the micro-political and macro-political spheres of education policy and funding. In addition, a set of follow-up questions were developed to allow participants to elaborate upon their responses if deemed necessary by the researcher. The interview questions were drafted by the researcher and approved by an expert panel that included one central office administrator from a district not associated with the study and two university supervisors from the Graduate School of Education at Baker University. The researcher performed a mock interview with a central office administrator who is well-versed in political advocacy work to provide feedback on the research protocol and interview questions. The mock interview provided an opportunity for the researcher to refine the interview questions.

      Participants were asked to describe their understanding of advocacy for policies and funding that support public schools in Missouri. Participants were asked to describe their experiences when working with their locally elected boards of education (micropolitical sphere) and with Missouri state legislators (macropolitical sphere). Additionally, participants were asked to describe the strategies they use when advocating for policies and funding that impact public schools in Missouri, and the actions or strategies they use most successfully to garner support for

policies and funding that support Missouri public schools. The questions allowed the researcher

to understand the experiences of public-school superintendents in Missouri in the process of

advocating for policy and funding that support public education. Follow-up questions were

probative. Creswell & Creswell (2018) stated that follow-up research questions or probes are

significant to an interview protocol because these types of questions "can expand the duration of

the interview as well as net useful information," (p. 191). Additionally, probes can generate a

deeper and more detailed understanding of central phenomena or themes that emerge during the

interview process.

Data Collection Procedures

Prior to contacting any research participant or conducting any part of the study, the

researcher completed a request to collect data via Baker University's Institution Review Board

(IRB) and received approval. All documentation pertinent to the IRB request and subsequent

approval to proceed are included in the appendices corresponding to this chapter. No ethical

concerns arose during the research. All participants gave their informed consent to participate in

the study of superintendents' perceptions of their role as political advocates for public education

policy under the Standard VI guidelines of the Missouri School Superintendent Evaluation. Data

collection methods included a participant consent form, a demographic questionnaire, and

individual video-conference interviews.

Once the study was approved through the IRB request, the researcher contacted the

participants by email that included an invitation to participate in the study, the background and

purpose of the study, and a form that asked for the subject's first and last names, preferred means

of contact, and whether the subject was willing to participate in the study. Subjects who agreed

to participate in the study were contacted by the researcher in a follow-up phone call to ensure

the study was understood and to schedule an individual interview at a time convenient for each potential subject. A second email was sent with a calendar invitation and information about the requirements of each subject who agreed to participate in the study: 1) a 30–60-minute interview using a video conference platform; 2) a consent form for each subject that required a digital signature; and, 3) the ability to access the video conferencing platform used for the study.

Following these initial contacts with research subjects, the researcher collected demographic data for each participant. The demographic data included gender, race/ethnicity, and school district population data. During the interview sessions, the researcher collected additional information from each participant. Each participant was asked to provide years of experience in their current position as superintendent and level of education.

All interviews followed the interview protocol to ensure that standard procedures were used with each subject. At the beginning of each interview, subjects were asked to verify their consent to participate in the interview and the research. The researcher read aloud the purpose statement and outlined the interview protocol with each subject. Participants were provided time to ask questions about the interview and the study. Following the interview protocol, all interview questions were open-ended, and the researcher did not interrupt subjects while they provided their responses. The interviews were recorded using video-conferencing software, and the researcher transcribed each recording for data analysis.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Creswell & Creswell (2018) advised qualitative researchers to "look at qualitative data analysis as a process that requires sequential steps to be followed, from the specific to the general, and involving multiple levels of analysis," (p. 193). To achieve rich, thematic data, the researcher followed Creswell & Creswell's (2018) five steps of data analysis:

1. organization and preparation of data by transcribing the interview recordings verbatim.

2. reading and annotation of the transcribed interviews to sort available data.

3. coding all the data by categorizing common language and content in each subject's responses.

4. generating themes and descriptions for coding.

5. representing the description and themes in a narrative format to provide meaning and "convey descriptive information," (pp. 193-195).

All data was sorted and coded to correspond with the central research question and sub-questions.

Following each interview, the researcher wrote an entry in a reflective journal to record details of the interview and personal insights into the information presented during each interview. According to Ortlipp (2008), this practice provides a transparent analysis of the data collected and a structure for a theoretical framework. Following each interview and journaling procedure, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings. Transcripts were emailed to each participant to check for accuracy and correct representation of their responses. Following each participant's transcript approval, all transcripts were uploaded into Quirkos software for analysis. The researcher read and annotated the transcripts to prepare for analysis and used in vivo labels to code and categorize data (Bloomberg & Volve, 2019). The categorized, recorded, and coded

terms were imported into Quirkos and exported to Excel for interpretation. The researcher annotated and codified the interview data to better understand each subject's responses to the interview questions. The central research question guided the analysis. After analyzing individual interview data, the researcher compared each participant's responses with others in the study to elucidate the phenomenological insights into the individual and collective responses to answer the study's central research question and research sub-questions.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

To assure the reliability of the study and the trustworthiness of the data, Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that valid qualitative research "clearly reflects the world being described," (p. 202). Bloomberg & Volpe (2019) advised that "criteria for evaluating the trustworthiness of qualitative data" include credibility and transferability (p. 202). To meet these criteria, several strategies were included:

1. Criterion 1 – Credibility: According to Bloomberg & Volpe (2019), this criterion for qualitative research should mirror quantitative internal validity. Two strategies were used to establish credibility: Member checks and peer debriefing. Each interview was conducted using a video conferencing platform and recorded. Following each interview, the researcher transcribed the recorded interview. Transcripts and recording were sent to the participants for a member check to make sure all recordings and transcripts were correctly represented. Additionally, a peer debriefing was also used to establish the credibility of the study. A central office administrator in the public school district where the researcher is employed conducted the peer debriefing. The administrator is the school district's political advocacy representative and is well-versed in both qualitative and quantitative

data analysis. The administrator reviewed both interview transcripts and the interpretation of the data (e.g., codes, categories, and themes) and provided feedback and insight into the accuracy of data analysis and interpretation.

2. Criterion 2 – Transferability: "Transferability is described as corresponding to the notion of external validity in quantitative research," (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 205). Qualitative research cannot provide the researcher or any reader the opportunity to generalize results and apply them to other populations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019); however, it does provide the opportunity for "thick description" (p. 205) that "allows readers to understand contextual factors, participants, and experiences" (p. 205). To meet the objectives of this criterion, a purposeful sampling strategy was used in the selection of participants. To provide a rich description of the participants' school districts, communities, and experiences in their advocacy and political behavior for policies and funding that support public education in Missouri, full descriptions of each school district's geopolitical and demographic setting were included to aid the reader in making "contextualized meaning" (p. 205) of the data.

Researcher's Role

The researcher of this study is a National Board Certified Teacher with twenty-four years of experience in Missouri secondary schools. Eight of those years were spent teaching in a high school alternative program in a large Missouri school district. As a teacher with career-long membership in the Missouri National Education Association (MNEA) who has participated in various MNEA capital action days and the Association's regional and state-level assemblies, the researcher has a personal stake in the political sphere of public education. Furthermore, the

researcher highly values the National Board standards of teacher advocacy for public education funding, pay equity for teachers, full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and reform of accountability measures. Lastly, the researcher's interest in the legislative and bureaucratic processes for public policy is life-long and encouraged by an educator parent who was a Missouri public-school superintendent in a large suburban school district before retirement in 1999.

The purposive sampling of study participants ensured that no claim of connection past or present existed between the researcher and research subjects. The decision to use member checks and peer debriefing of data allowed the researcher to interpret and minimize any impact of implicit bias.

Limitations

This study was subject to limitations of time and design that include the following:

1. The sample of respondents is not representative of all Missouri superintendents. Only one superintendent from each of Missouri's eight congressional districts was interviewed. The criteria of participants changed based on the superintendents' interest and availability.

2. No large urban or suburban districts in the Kansas City area were represented in the study. One rural district outside the Kansas City Metropolitan area represented Missouri Congressional District 5.

3. The study represented two large urban or suburban school districts in the St. Louis area because of the small geographic area of the congressional districts in that part of the state.

4. While the study was intended to be a replicated design, it cannot be accurately compared to the original, nor does it represent all public-school superintendents in Missouri or any public-school superintendent outside of Missouri.

5. The participants were asked to review a written transcript of their responses for accuracy; however, the data were dependent on participants' subjective self-reported narratives and could not be checked or verified.

Summary

The study explored the strategies used by Missouri public-school superintendents as they engage with representative political bodies like their local boards of education and state-level legislators. Additionally, subjects were selected through purposive sampling. They were invited to share the strategies of engagement in their advocacy work and their beliefs about their effectiveness in securing public-school funding, policies, and resources as described in Standard VI of the Missouri School Superintendent Standard Evaluation. Data were gathered in interviews, transcribed, and analyzed by the researcher for interpretation.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which Missouri public-school superintendents engage in political advocacy to secure policies and funding that benefit students in the education systems they lead. The researcher employed a phenomenological research design to explore the strategies Missouri public-school superintendents use as they advocate to secure policies and funding that support public school systems in the state. The principal research question and three sub-questions guided the research through interview sessions with eight Missouri public-school superintendents. Six of the eight represented rural school districts across the state, and two of the eight represented urban school districts along the eastern border of Missouri. Each selected school district is situated in one of Missouri's eight congressional districts.

Each of the participant's interview transcripts was analyzed through an in vivo coding process. These codes were entered as "quirks" in Quirkos software for further analysis. Six common themes emerged and were combined to express similar ideologies, experiences, and views on the political processes and advocacy roles superintendents employ as they work to secure funding to support public schools in Missouri. Identified themes include: 1) Advocacy; 2) Modes of Communication; 3) Influence; 4) Representation; 5) Role of the Superintendent; and 6) Funding.

Figure 1
Distribution of 'Theme'
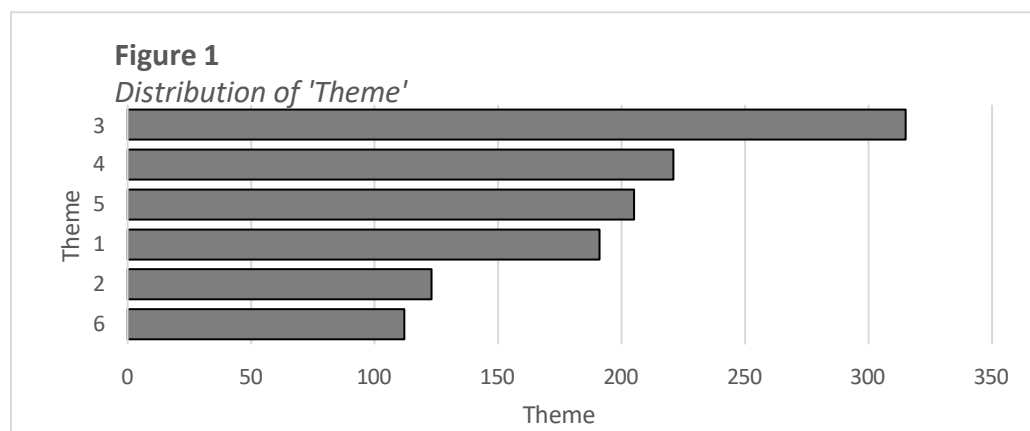
Themes and categories were sorted in an Excel document. Each theme and related category is presented when relevant to the research question and sub-questions.

Findings for Principal Research Question

The principal research question examined Missouri public-school superintendents' involvement in political advocacy to secure policies and funding that benefit the public-school systems they lead. Pursuant to this question, all six themes were identified in participants' responses. These include advocacy, modes of communication, influence, representation, the role of the superintendent, and funding.

Theme 1: Advocacy—All eight participants have experience in the advocacy processes that help secure funding for public schools. This advocacy is not necessarily tied to a superintendent's own school district but to public school systems across the state. A participant representing Missouri Congressional District 5 stated, "I do think that the advocacy is central to your own district, but you're also out there doing it for all public schools," (Participant A)

Direct Advocacy—For this study, direct advocacy included a superintendent's use of direct lines of communication that include phone calls to a legislator, emails or written correspondence to a legislator, virtual meetings with a legislator,

or face-to-face interactions with a legislator either in Jefferson City or in the community and school district the legislator represents. All eight participants have used these forms of direct advocacy, which are further explored in Theme 2, Modes of Communication.

Organizational Advocacy—This type of advocacy refers to large professional networks that include the Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA), Missouri Association of School Business Officials (MOASBO), Missouri School Boards Association (MSBA), National Education Association (NEA), Missouri Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Cooperating School Districts of Greater Kansas City (CSDGKC), and Education Plus. Each of these organizations has a legislative body that employs lobbyists who directly interact with legislators in Jefferson City and who provide resources and information for their members and value their efforts as "…an excellent job of keeping us informed on legal, financial, and political issues" (Participants A). All eight participants belong to one or more of these organizations and rely heavily on their work. One suburban public-school superintendent relied heavily on these types of professional networks and stated, "I would say those big organizations carry a lot of weight and, you know, those are the people that you want to be talking to and… we do. And they form their platforms each year about what they're going to support," (Participant F). One participant advises, "MoASBO has put together a tool kit and a guide for administrators on how to advocate as new administrators. They need to make sure that they are looking into those things and getting educated on advocacy," (Participant H).

Political Pressure— Despite the exertions of superintendents' advocacy efforts, two of the eight participants specifically state their views that legislators in Missouri cave to the political pressures of partisan politics and do not serve the communities and school districts they represent. Seven of the eight participants leave direct political pressure to organizations, but all eight participants have directly engaged with their state representatives and state senators through invitations to participate in school functions, personal conversations, and community outreach.

Reluctance—Four of the eight participants stated they were sometimes hesitant or "apprehensive" (Participant G) early in their careers to advocate or interact with their legislators directly. Two of the eight participants cited hesitancy to advocate directly with their state representatives or senators. One participant has found it to be ineffective and unreliable and stated, "It doesn't do a lot of good to go up and just meet with the legislator one-on-one and say, 'Do you realize this is really going to hurt your school district?'" Another participant is selective about when and how often to advocate for a bill or legislation that impacts public school funding because it is a significant investment of time to do so with little guarantee of the desired outcome. Participant A stated, "I generally do not have the time or the breath to invest in it, and so I, I, [sic] try and be selective."

Theme 2: Modes of Communication—Communication between superintendents, state legislators, community stakeholders, and various organizations to which they are members is noteworthy because of the time and commitment it takes on all sides to find any type of common ground in Missouri's partisan politics. Each of the eight participants

uses telecommunications, electronic communications (text messages and emails), virtual communications, and face-to-face communications in meetings and personal visits. All these modes of communication are legitimate, and each has its pitfalls and impact.

Effective Communication—Six participants find direct, face-to-face communications most effective in their advocacy efforts. Part of this stems from the relationships between the superintendent and legislator over time. Participant G stated, "I know our local legislators on a first-name basis very well, so I contact them directly most commonly." One superintendent does not find one mode of communication tore advantageous than another; five stated that en masse emails may be effective because of the sheer volume. Participant H noted, "I think it is effective when a constituent group starts to flood their representatives with emails. If there is something that is going to be harmful to teachers. And our teachers mobilize by sending emails to their representatives. I think that is very impactful." Six participants noted the significant uptick in virtual meetings, webinars, and live streaming since the state-wide shutdown of schools in the Spring 0f 2020 as a mitigation effort to stop the spread of Covid 19. One participant stated, "I think it's easier to be more politically involved and active with all the access we have to media, social media, just communicating through tools, so I can work with superintendents of schools my size clear across the state," (Participant B).

Ineffective Communication—By and large, superintendents find emails least effective because while they may be useful to help set meeting times with legislators, they are not conducive to effective advocacy measures. One

participant noted that electronic communications make it difficult to understand tone and other nonverbal cues that enhance face-to-face communication (Participant A). Participant B stated, "I feel like sometimes when I send an email, I'm not sure if an aide or, you know, someone in the group responded." The other seven participants of the study echoed this sentiment.

Battle Language—This type of military idiom is pervasive in American nomenclature and prevalent in the language used by superintendents. Seven of the eight superintendents used battle language 14 times during the eight interviews. While this is less than one percent of all words spoken during these eight interviews, it was an unexpected link in the education vernacular. These occurrences are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Participant Use of Military Idioms

Idiom	Frequency of Usage
Hill worth fighting for/ Hill I want to die on	2
Mobilize	5
Fight fire with fire	1
Make enemies	1
Rally my troops	1
Bombard the legislator	1
Under Attack	1
Pick our battles	1
Beat the drum	1
Total	**14**

Dissemination of Information—Part of a superintendent's role is to provide information to keep stakeholders informed. All eight superintendents reported that they use legislative actions and updates and report at least monthly to their Boards of Education. The superintendents all express the importance of this type of communication because it keeps them informed of what is happening during legislative sessions in Missouri, and it allows their boards of education to take on legislative advocacy as well. Additionally, four of the eight participants report sharing information with their legislators regarding the impact legislation will have on their school districts and to other school districts in Missouri. This sharing of information is crucial to empowering boards of education and superintendents to set their own legislative agendas. Participant A said, "My personal style with the board of education has been to always over-communicate. I never want my board to get bad news, good news, any news without hearing from me about it as well." Participant H stated, "I think that's important from the start to educate new board members as they come on about advocacy…we have a point person that keeps them up to date on pending legislation that could impact us…We make sure that they understand our position as a school district. Participant F keeps the board of education aware of legislation and encourages members to contact legislators directly because, "They can advocate a lot of ways I can't when it comes to, you know, being on the clock and being paid for by taxpayers' money."

Theme 3: Influence—A public school superintendent leads a school district in every capacity. Rural superintendents shoulder the bulk of all responsibilities with little of the same assistance that is provided to superintendents to their urban and suburban counterparts. One participant stated, "I am a central office of one," (Participant C). Regardless of the number of assistants and directors who are delegated a portion of the responsibility of school management, the superintendent's influence is broad and wide with community stakeholders, boards of education, parents, students, lawmakers, and with each other. It is a powerful position within the community and increases in power based on the relationships a superintendent forms with stakeholders, legislators, et al.

Relationships—All participants spoke about the importance of relationship building. For the three superintendents who have stayed with the school districts where they were first hired to be teachers, building administrators, or the communities they grew up in, these relationships are time-tested and mutually beneficial. For superintendents who are new to their communities (less than ten years of experience), building trust in the community is more of a struggle. One participant with a vast history in the school district and community stated, "They know me on a first name basis. In in [sic] rural areas, they like to come to the county fairs, and they support us" (Participant G). Not all relationships are so friendly. One participant struggles to connect with state representatives and turns to the community for support and advocacy.

Business and Community Partnerships—Paramount to a superintendent's success in every professional capacity, including advocacy, is building, and maintaining strong partnerships with business and community leaders. This

broadens the superintendent's professional network, and organizations like state and local chambers of commerce can assist in the advocacy for public school funding because of their strong legislative networks. All the participants mentioned their work with their local chambers of commerce and other economic development networks because, "Our local chamber of commerce and other boards within the community, they will be impacted, one way or another, by educational legislation," (Participant A).

Symbiotic Relationships—These business networks, community partnerships, and advocacy organizations that exist outside of the public-school entity are mutually beneficial to all members. All the participants acknowledged the importance of these relationships because, as one participant stated, "You're not going to have a good community with a bad school system," (Participant F).

Grassroots Efforts—Participants in the study employ a variety of strategies and tactics to garner community support and representation. One participant actively seeks retired educators to run for state office. One participant has the support of a parent in the school district with ties to legislators in Jefferson City who actively advocates for funding and policies that support the school district. Another participant employs local business and economic development networks as well as the military community to keep public-school funding in the forefront of legislators' minds. This participant openly acknowledged the paradox in legislators' political agendas. While this region's state senator supports all military funding in the state, he does not support the schools that military children attend (Participant H).

Experience—The participants in this study collectively hold nearly 100 years of experience in their current positions. These years of experience do not include their years as classroom teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators. Their expertise provides opportunities for advocacy and challenges state legislators who often pass bills that have the potential to harm public education in Missouri. Their experience gives them insight into the reality of politics and policy in Missouri. One participant concisely summed up the state of affairs in Missouri politics and present attitudes about public education: "My job is to continue to advocate even when I feel that there's going to be no movement or no change to how folks proceed," (Participant D).

Theme 4: Representation—A cornerstone to the democratic process, school districts are part of a representative's constituency. All eight participants expressed the lack of representation among its state representatives and senators.

Elected Officials—These representatives range from federal representatives in the House and Senate to locally elected boards of education and city councils. Five participants spoke about the idea that educators should broaden the scope of their work to include federal policy.

Board of Education—All eight participants cited the support of the boards of education, city councils, economic development organizations, and community stakeholders.

Partisanship—Five of the participants spoke directly to the partisan nature of politics in the state and the detrimental consequences of not fully funding public schools. This category was coded 15 times.

Political Climate—Missouri, once considered a bellwether state, is firmly

planted in "red territory," as one participant stated. Under GOP control for the last

twenty years, the discourse around and about public schools is increasingly

vitriolic and recognized by all eight participants. Participant E stated, "It's

the…environment has changed greatly, and I don't think that we carry the same

level of appreciation that we once did, and that's unfortunate."

Legislative Agenda—Six of the participants discussed charter school expansion

legislation, teacher shortage, rumored school consolidation, and virtual schools as

pieces of public education funding that will cut resources from traditional public-

school systems.

Theme 5: Role of the Superintendent—The work of a public-school superintendent is

addressed in this theme. All eight superintendents spoke about the categories listed.

Political Action—This category includes participants' efforts to recruit

candidates for office, their willingness to activate their staff and community

leaders to advocate for or against the legislation, and their level of engagement

during the legislative process. One participant supports pro-public education

candidates. All participants call on staff and community leaders to call, email and

meet with legislators when there is a bill that does harm to public education

funding. Five of the participants discussed the strategic ways that they can interact

with legislators "before a good bill turns bad overnight," (Participant F).

Professionalism—All eight participants discussed the reality that while advocacy

is not always a pleasant aspect of the job of a superintendent, it is an important

and time-consuming part of it. One participant commented that advocacy could be a full-time job in and of itself (Participant C).

Strategic Planning—As school district personnel prepare for the latest round of the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP 6) rolls into place, superintendents are working with their boards of education to revise their strategic plans. One participant stated, "Our initiatives on our strategic plan have to be supported by legislation," (Participant H). One participant wanted to reconsider the idea of tying strategic plan goals to legislative outcomes and advocacy. One participant stated that one of the pillars of their strategic plan included advocacy in areas of equity and social justice. Four of the superintendents were in the process of revising their strategic plans but did not comment on legislative goals or outcomes.

Theme 6: Funding—Schools in Missouri are funded through a Foundation Formula that calculates average daily attendance (ADA), local, state, and federal tax dollars, local property tax rates, and the percentage of students with special needs (DESE, 2022). The largest expense in education is teacher salaries. Legislation in the past decade funnels funding from public schools through charter school funding, four-day school weeks, voucher systems (MO Scholars), virtual schools, homeschooling, and other school choice programs.

Public Education—All eight participants are public-school superintendents in public school systems in Missouri. There are 518 school districts in Missouri, of which 25% are on four-day weeks. There is a good deal of conversation on social media and within the education community that connects this phenomenon to low

teacher pay that has created a teacher shortage in Missouri. Both *The Missouri News Leader* and *St. Louis Public Radio* have reported that Missouri ranks 50th in beginning teacher pay. Participant G wondered, "If we want to say there's a teacher shortage, I mean, there are still some school districts—there's a lot of school districts that have less than 200 kids and…what we do have to think is, can...we maintain those really small schools and still continue to pay teachers well?"

Equity—One participant spoke about concerns for equity in funding public schools and stated, "You know, our elected officials are very clear about the movement for vouchers and charters that's just, uh, that's a movement that's very prevalent," (Participant D). This superintendent represents a suburban school district competing for students whose families are choosing charter schools, private schools, or other publicly funded education platforms outside of the traditional public school system. This reallocation of resources creates marginalized communities that do not have a choice when it comes to their education. Participant D stated, "When you think about, like, choice, and…funding and use, like, for religious schools and things of that nature, the communities and populations that are most vulnerable are the ones that are going to be left behind." Participant A, who represented a rural school district, stated, "True champions of public education are going to be marginalized to a great extent in the--in the years to come…"

School Consolidation—According to three of the eight participants, more concerning than charter school expansion is school consolidation that would close

very small rural school districts and combine them to make a larger school district. While there is no legislation at the time of the study that targeted consolidation, it is heavily rumored and an area of concern mentioned by seven of the participants; however, one participant stated, "That conversation has been going on in the state for years," (Participant H). Participant G spoke of the political implications of school consolidation and said of political candidates, "They cannot run on that in rural Missouri and win."

Charter Schools—The major concern for funding loss at the inception of this study, charter schools, and the public funding used to support them were hardly mentioned by three of the eight participants. Participant F said, "That's been around since the Reagan days." Other concerns like consolidation, virtual schools, homeschooling, MO Scholars, etc., and efforts to cut all property taxes in one large St. Louis area county are more pressing concerns and addressed by one urban and rural school district specifically.

Findings for Sub Question 1

This question relates to superintendents' strategic planning and strategic advocacy. In other words, how do they advocate, and with whom do they advocate? Furthermore, the question seeks to understand how superintendents work with their boards of education to develop strategic plans that include legislative advocacy of at least one of its goals. Five themes emerged and include advocacy, modes of communication, influence, representation, and the role of the superintendent.

Theme 1: Advocacy—Understanding advocacy as it relates to sub-question two requires superintendents to think strategically and implement an action plan to address their state-

level representatives during the legislative session each year in Missouri. The Missouri legislature is in session from January to the end of May each calendar year, and special sessions may be called by the governor.

Direct Advocacy—These methods of advocacy include correspondence (written or electronic), phone calls, attending Capital Action Days for in-person meetings with a legislator, and other personal invitations a superintendent offers a state-level representative. The success of direct advocacy is varied. One superintendent reported that a state legislator was invited to attend a board of education meeting to discuss his proposed legislation. The representative agreed and was on the agenda, but he never showed up and did not call ahead of time to let the superintendent know he would not attend (Participant F). Another superintendent noted that to get past legislative aids in a representative's office, he has found that it is important to know them as well as he knows his representative. He stated, "Advocacy is not just done with policymakers, it's also done in the office spaces," (Participant A).

Organizational Advocacy—All eight superintendents rely on large organizations like MASA and MoASBO to provide a legislative platform and consistent updates on legislative action taken in Missouri's General Assembly and Senate. These organizations are impactful because "Your lobbyists continue to have a good, crafted platform and continue to fight the good fight until the whole issue of public education is put in a better light in Jefferson City," (Participant F). While all participants are members of these large organizations, two rural superintendents are primarily interested in how legislation and advocacy directly

impact their school districts. One participant stated, "The superintendents in my county will probably work together for issues that are closer to home for us as opposed to going through an organization that might be made up of schools of varying demographics," (Participant B).

Political Pressure—Superintendents think carefully about what candidates they can support during election seasons. While they cannot do so in a professional capacity, their Boards of Education can. Six of the eight participants either directly contribute to a campaign, recruit candidates, and trust their boards of education to do the same. One participant noted, "So, what we have learned is that we have got to be strategic on who we get to run for state rep or state senator, and we don't leave that up to accident," (Participant G).

Theme 2: Modes of Communication—Modes of communication included the written correspondence, telecommunications systems, and face-to-face interactions superintendents employ when planning their advocacy work. These modes of communication came down to two elements or categories of the theme that included the ways in which superintendents gather and share information and the messaging or public relations strategies that they use to unify their messages to representatives and community stakeholders who have sway with legislators.

Dissemination of Information—In the same way superintendents rely on frequently updated information regarding legislation, all eight superintendents report directly to their boards of education with an accurate account of legislative bills and initiatives. They all report giving monthly updates to their boards of education. This information is helpful for board of education members to develop

legislative action plans and advocacy plans of their own. Participant H stated, "We make sure that they understand our position as a school district, and then that individual kind of takes the lead if there is a request for a board member to appear before the House or the Senate."

Messaging—All eight participants discussed the need for Missouri superintendents to unify their messages to their communities and to the politicians that represent Missourians in Jefferson City. Each of the eight participants opined that unity and staying "on-message" (Participant D) would have a greater impact on legislators and policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels. The phrase "common ground" was used by seven of the eight participants at during their interview. One participant stated, "It's important as we are putting together our legislative platform that we look at all the various school districts and how our position might impact them and make sure that we focus on common ground," (Participant H).

Theme 3: Influence—A superintendent serves at the pleasure of a board of education; however, the position is a powerful one. A superintendent is expected to be a unifying voice and a "good steward" of community tax dollars and of the school system (Participant A)

    Building Relationships—All eight participants viewed building relationships as one of the most important aspects of their jobs. Personal and professional relationships anchor a superintendent in a community and create a sphere of influence among stakeholders. Two participants proudly spoke of former students who are now state legislators. One of these participants said, "It was just really

exciting to go back to Jefferson City, schedule an appointment with his office, and sit down with him as a former student and just kind of laugh and talk, but also to engage in a conversation about why public education is so important." One superintendent has recruited pro-education candidates who are former educators to represent his community. These personal connections allow a superintendent to openly discuss their political agendas with their representatives, and Participant A recognized, "The key strategy in that--as much as forming the relationships with the legislators themselves, is befriending and nurturing relationships with their staff."

Business and Community Partnerships—All eight participants are actively involved with their local chambers of commerce and other economic development organizations that promote the public-school systems in their region. One participant in a rural school district has successfully fought for a factory to be built in the community. While the factory enjoyed a tax abatement, the purchase of homes and property by workers has increased the school district's assessed valuation from $4,000 to $800,000 (Participant G). The ability to create such relationships and influence community and business stakeholders is a key strategy that superintendents in rural districts use. Five of the six rural participants spoke about this, and all of them are looking for unifying solutions to bridge the political gap and the demographic gap between rural and urban/suburban communities.

Theme 4: Representation—School districts, like businesses, churches, and voters, are represented by elected officials in Jefferson City. Six of the eight superintendents, all of them rural, noted that they maintain a working relationship with their representatives.

Seven of the eight participants feel that their elected representatives are "pro-education." These seven participants have little faith in Missouri politicians to create and pass legislation that will benefit public schools in the state. Participant A stated, "You can't politicize education to that extent and not have it take a toll long term." The bills passed in 2020, 2021, and 2022 supported vouchers, virtual schools, homeschooling, and charter school expansion over traditional public schools in Missouri.

Political Climate--The current highly partisan political climate that one participant referred to as "increasingly vicious" (Participant A) was a concern shared by all eight participants. One participant expressed fear that marginalized communities and children will be further impacted by recent efforts that seek to pull funding out of public schools in favor of charter school expansion, vouchers, and other school choice legislation (Participant D).

Access to Representatives—Access to representatives and policymakers was not only defined by a representative's willingness to meet with a superintendent, but for one participant, it is geographical as well. Travel between this rural school district and the state capital in Jefferson City is difficult because "There is no direct route," (Participant A). Six of the eight participants, all of whom are in rural school districts, noted the positive changes technology has brought to their advocacy work and access to their representatives. It is an outgrowth of pandemic protocols in place since 2020 (Participant B). This access includes live-streaming legislative debates, real-time communication with representatives through texting and other digital communications, and video conferencing.

Theme 5: Role of the Superintendent—Superintendents take their role as educational leaders very seriously. Two participants, one rural and one suburban, discussed the image of a superintendent and the practical nature of not being a source of divisiveness or disunity in their communities. Participant F said, "…that just makes it look like the whole thing, well, the whole thing looks cheap, and it's got to be a partnership." All the participants in the study discussed the seriousness of their work as educators, advocates, and unifying forces in their communities. Participant E advised, "Yeah, first thing to know is it's part of the job." Seven of the eight discussed at length their involvement in local and community services as part of their jobs and their professional obligations to advocate for policies and legislation that support public education. Participant A stated, "And so the business community, the political community, the school community are all inextricably interwoven, and we each have a part to play." Only one superintendent stated they were not as engaged in the "politics of education" (Participant B) as they might have been during their tenure as superintendent.

> **Strategic Planning**—Part of a superintendent's role is to work with locally elected boards of education to develop a strategic plan and a set of related goals for their school district. Four of the eight participants mentioned the need to update strategic plans to include a legislative platform. Three of the eight participants have legislative platforms listed as one of their goals. One participant's goals are all specifically linked to legislation. Participant C said, "I think letting our legislators know what our strategic planning goals are, what it is that we need to reach our goals…can help me to accomplish these goals."

Transactional Leadership--The term transactional leadership was never used or discussed in the study; however, it bears discussion as part of the role of a superintendent. Part of the advocacy work, symbiotic relationships with business and community partners, and leadership of superintendents is transactional. Five of the eight participants alluded to the transactional nature of their position. Succinctly put by one participant, "We want to be making efforts that directly benefit our particular demographic, architecture, particular culture or particular goal," (Participant E).

Findings for Sub Question 2

Sub-question 2 questions the execution of each strategy a superintendent uses when advocating for policies and funding that support public education. The emergent themes were advocacy, modes of communication, and the role of the superintendent.

Theme 1: Advocacy--The parameters of this study define advocacy as either direct or organizational. As discussed, all eight superintendents use strategies that meet the definitions of both. The more specific inquiry posed in sub-question 2 is the execution of these advocacy efforts. All eight superintendents employ a measure of political pressure to advance their cause. Additionally, all eight superintendents recognize that the current political climate leaves them to advocate against legislation rather than for legislation (Participant F).

Political Pressure--It is through relationships, professional and personal networks, and community involvement that superintendents can exert pressure on their representatives. All eight participants use some measure of political pressure to meet their goals; however, none of the participants felt it had influence on

representatives once they get to Jefferson City. Two participants discussed the necessity to advocate with candidates before they are elected; otherwise, the political pressure inside the capital is too difficult for them to stand against (Participant A and Participant G). Participant F reflected, "They always used to come together for what was good for our county and our schools, and they haven't done that in a while."

Theme 2: Modes of Communication--The means by which a superintendent communicates with their representatives, boards of education, and community stakeholders is a balancing act. On the one hand, all eight of the superintendents acknowledged in their interview that they must be careful not to alienate themselves or their community or create divisiveness. Part of the frustration superintendents expressed in the legislative process and Missouri's current political climate is apparent in the following ways:

Battle Language—as previously noted, this type of language was most used when discussing strategic advocacy. Five of the participants discussed the power of mobilizing teachers to impact legislation at the state and federal levels (Participant D). The abrasive nature of this type of language is recognizable even to the participants who use it, but it is a language that unifies people in a cause. Additionally, it recognizes the power of teacher organizations as a political force in the state (Participant H). This participant stated, "If teachers are all together on an issue, legislators know pretty quickly because our teachers are very quick to mobilize once they've been made aware of legislators trying to move a bill through that's going to have a negative impact on our teachers."

Messaging—All participants wish to see a clear, unified message from public educators across the state. They all recognize that part of their job is to advocate for and serve the communities in which they are employed, but because of the political climate, all of them commented on the need to work in concert with one another because what impacts one impacts all. One urban participant discussed the state-wide legislative effort to end property tax in a single county. Another participant discussed the political allies in rural areas of Missouri who support the effort to end property taxes in one county in the state. The idea of unified messaging was not mentioned by any participant within the context of organizational advocacy. They stated, "We like to be on the same page. If we feel like we have competing interests, then we can work out locally what the compromise is and what the message is that we need to send to Jefferson City," (Participant H).

Theme 5: Role of Superintendent—It is the role of a superintendent to collaborate with community and business leaders and their boards of education to determine their legislative goals and desired outcomes. Because the political climate is fraught with contention, superintendents must weigh the harms against the gains of their advocacy and find areas of compromise.

Cost/Benefit Analysis—This type of strategic thinking is organic to Participant F who analyzed legislative agendas each session by asking, "What can we live with? What can't we live with?" One participant spoke directly about the opportunity cost of advocacy and stated, "I look at the opportunity cost and so I don't think we can always go every time there's an issue to…come to our senators

and representatives when we have a concern. I think we need to be selective," (Participant G). Another participant discussed evaluating which "hill is worth fighting for" before contacting representatives and senators (Participant A). Another participant spoke about the risk of division and harmful outcomes to public education (Participant H.).

Findings for Sub Question 3

Sub Question 3 sought to understand the ways in which Missouri public-school superintendents evaluated the success of the strategies they used to advocate for policies and funding that support public education in the state. The themes that emerged related to sub-question 3 were: 1) advocacy, 2) modes of communication, 3) influence, 4) representation, 5) role of the superintendent, and 6) funding.

Theme 1: Advocacy—The evaluation of successful advocacy was difficult for superintendents because all eight participants recognized there is extraordinarily little movement among legislators to support public schools. Participant E stated, "If you want your advocacy to be heard, it has to be a greater voice than just one or two people."

Organizational Advocacy—All participants overwhelmingly believe in the political strength of the professional organizations to which they belong. Three participants identified successful lobbyists in at least one of these organizations by name. Participant F said, "…and he lives and breathes and bleeds over legislation that comes up in every, every session."

Political Pressure—There is strength in numbers when it comes to successfully advocating with the state legislature, and organizations have the numbers and the full-time lobbyists to exert the pressure needed to campaign for or against legislation that is

harmful to public education. Participant A said, "They have their own agendas, but ultimately, even when the opinions differ on a given topic, we all want the same thing. And that's what's best for kids."

Theme 2: Modes of Communication—Successful superintendents are willing and able to meet directly with their representatives. The six participants from rural school districts all cited successful interactions they had with their legislators and with other community stakeholders. The two urban/suburban superintendents have had interactions with their representatives where their concerns, they felt, were heard by their legislators, but one of the superintendents in this subset of participants had to go back four decades to recall a time when politics were more bipartisan. Participant F recalled, "We had a mix of Republicans and Democrats, but they would always come together." Now, the same participant remarked, "It doesn't do a lot of good to go up and just meet with the legislator one-on-one," (Participant F).

> **Messaging**—This category was mentioned 48 times throughout the series of eight interviews. As noted in sub-question 2, all eight participants called for a consistent message to legislators. It is the organizational legislative platforms that give credence to their message, and they rely heavily on that platform and professional lobbyists to deliver their messages. Only one participant felt individually successful in communicating with legislators in the current political climate. The participant stated, "And when I call, I know that the legislator I'm trying to reach actually hears my message," (Participant B).

Theme 3: Influence—This theme was the most frequently discussed by the participants. All eight participants are acutely aware of their position within the community and the

power it wields when used to impact legislative goals that benefit not only their school

districts but public education systems across the state.

Community and Business Partnerships—These relationships appear to be the

most important on a personal and professional level to each of the participants.

Participant A who was particularly knowledgeable about the political aspects of

his job, expressed very personal feelings about what could be very difficult

partnerships if they are not built on mutual respect and a desire to help students

because, "They recognize that what is good for the business community is good

for the school and in a reciprocal fashion, what is good for the school is good for

the business community." Participant G said, "But I also advocate for, like,

economic development, and so we were able to attract a major factory into our

community."

Unity—Seven of the eight superintendents believe more can be done to achieve

legislative goals that are consistent with creating and maintaining civically

engaged and community-centered school districts. The six rural superintendents

discussed the ways in which rural school districts have a distinct set of problems

than their large urban counterparts; however, all of them discussed that if they

were to reach out to superintendents across the state who work with different

demographics, it would be a powerful political force. One rural superintendent

stated, "We have to present a united front, and sometimes that's been difficult for

school districts when you have 525 school districts or more in the state of

Missouri," (Participant H). Another acknowledged that this number of school

districts may present a greater opportunity to be heard by the state legislature. One

urban superintendent and two rural superintendents discussed their view that unified messaging and advocacy needs to be done at the federal level as well.

Grassroots Efforts—Five participants focused on the impact of their work at the local and community level to affect change among Missouri legislators. One said, "What we have learned is that we have got to be strategic on who we get to run for state rep or state senator, and we don't leave that up to accident," (Participant G). Another participant narrowed the focus to the local level and stated, "Our particular goal, and so usually the state, uh, strategic plan is about supporting public education and it's very focused on grassroots school districts…," (Participant E). Still, another remarked about the future of advocacy, "I think you'll see more of united efforts [sic] where groups come together, kind of at a grassroots level, not a political organization affiliation," (Participant B).

Experience—One superintendent was interviewed on their last day before retirement. Another superintendent is the longest-serving superintendent in the state of Missouri. Of the eight participants, four of them have served in top-level school administration for more than a decade. The newest superintendent has enough experience to convey disappointment in the process and said, "I hate that you have to learn that you may hope that the more information you give them-- the more accurate data and those kind of things-- you're able to change and… move the needle and there are times you can, but there's a lot of times the decisions already made," (Participant C).

Voice—Three of the eight participants made a specific reference to the voice of public educators and students and the importance of having a voice that is

considered part of the legislative process. A participant whose legislators represent more than 200,000 of Missouri's public-school students stated, "It's up to us that have had some time in education to make sure that we are getting our voice out there," (Participant F).

Advice for Future Leaders—All the participants expressed concerns for the future of education in Missouri. One participant called the future "bleak," (Participant A), but all eight participants discussed the need for younger superintendents to work together to unify the message and story of public schools. Two of the participants acknowledge public education as foundational to the foundational principles of democracy. Three superintendents expressed a desire to mentor new superintendents either through the existing administrator training required under the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) or through personal outreach efforts. Of new school leaders, Participant A said, "I think they're the right people, and they will—they will have the right energy, I think, to fight this fight."

Theme 4: Representation—Locally elected boards of education are central to success in the political sphere. Board members can reach beyond the scope of a superintendent, and all eight participants work to educate their boards of education on current legislative concerns. Superintendent A stated, "We lean on our local boards of education as those elected persons of influence to generate grassroots…political pressure."

Boards of Education—Six of the participants discussed the significant role board of education members play in the legislative process because, "Legislatively, politically, financially, our…locally elected boards have tremendous power,"

(Participant A). As one participant put it, "They can advocate a lot of ways I can't when it comes to, you know, me being on the clock as being paid for by taxpayers' money," (Participant F).

Summary

The principal research question, what are the experiences of public-school superintendents in Missouri in the process of advocating for policy and funding that support public education, examined the political engagement of eight public-school superintendents in Missouri. Each superintendent was interviewed to discover the strategies superintendents from eight regions across the state use when advocating for policies and funding that support public education in Missouri and the impact of their work. All the participants agree that legislative advocacy is an important part of their job. An interpretation of findings and suggestions for further study and political action recommendations are included in chapter five.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

Missouri public-school superintendents have a unique perspective on the legislative agenda of state-level politicians and the negative impact that policies designed to defund public schools have on the communities they serve. This study was designed to explore this perspective and the role of public-school superintendents in Missouri as they advocate for policies and legislation that support public schools. Chapter five contains the study summary, an overview of the problem, the purpose statement and research questions, a review of the methodology, and findings related to the literature. Chapter five also contains a conclusion of the study with implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks that include observations on the future of advocacy for policies and legislation that support public school systems in Missouri.

Study Summary

The advocacy role of public-school superintendents in Missouri is an influential stop-gap measure against legislation aimed at reducing funding to Missouri public schools. Public-school superintendents retain considerable influence over leaders of the business community, boards of education, and other stakeholders, and this influence is not taken for granted. As the political climate across the country becomes increasingly hostile to public schools, the purview of the superintendency requires strategic, purposeful planning to find new and creative ways to secure adequate funding for public schools.

>   **Overview of the Problem**—As reported by Bjork, Kowalski, and Browne-Ferrigno (2014), superintendents are primarily concerned with funding schools, and their position has a degree of influence on funding and related policies in state-level politics. Research

done since *A Nation at Risk* reframed the educational zeitgeist in 1983 reform efforts have attempted to draw money out of public schools and into publicly funded charter schools and private schools. The push to defund public schools defies political affiliation because both major political parties in the country have championed privatization, charter school expansion, and other school choice models. In Missouri, the influence of superintendents, school board members, teachers, and other stakeholders is waning in the fight against privatization.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions—The purpose of the study was to discover the scope of Missouri public-school superintendents' involvement in political advocacy for policies and funding that benefit public education in Missouri. The study explored the strategies superintendents use in their advocacy work, the perceptions superintendents hold of political advocacy and their introspective assessments of their influence on the political process. The principal research question posited, "What are the experiences of public-school superintendents in Missouri in the process of advocating for policy and funding that support public education?" Three sub-questions supported this central question and were written as follows:

Sub RQ1: What strategies do public-school superintendents in Missouri employ when advocating for policy and funding that support public education?

Sub RQ2: How do public-school superintendents in Missouri execute each strategy when advocating for policy and funding that support public education?

Sub RQ3: How do public-school superintendents in Missouri evaluate each strategy employed in advocating for policy and funding that support public education?

Review of the Methodology—The study was a phenomenological design used to explore the experiences, political behaviors, and strategic advocacy for public school policy and funding by Missouri public-school superintendents. The participants were all currently serving public-school superintendents and were in various stages of their careers. All participants were interviewed through a video conferencing platform, and all the interviews were recorded and transcribed for in vivo coding. The researcher completed four cycles of coding and mapping to uncover common themes and categories to answer the principal research question and the ensuing sub-questions. The first was performed using a manual in vivo coding method. Rounds two and three of coding and mapping were performed using Quirkos, a qualitative analysis software program. Round four was completed by downloading the Quirkos report into an Excel document where themes could be easily determined through pivot charts.

Major Findings—The major findings of the study painted a portrait of public-school superintendents in Missouri as well-informed, politically savvy, experienced, and clever leaders who are unafraid to use the power of their position to defend the work of public-school educators across the state. Through the course of coding and analysis, six themes emerged and were analyzed in Chapter 4; however, four significant themes emerged that fully answered the principal research question and the three sub-questions presented in the interviews conducted for the study.

> **Influence**—The first major finding, influence, addressed the power superintendents wield in their communities and with their state legislators. To answer the principal research question, the researcher examined participants' language and word choice as they discussed their experiences with legislators

who frequently vote in favor of bills and policies that limit, reduce, or threaten the funding of public schools in Missouri. It was found that public-school superintendents feel they have less sway with legislators than they may have had in previous decades and in more amicable political climates; however, their influence on community stakeholders and within business networks is significant. These business networks often have the ear of elected representatives who frequently vote for bills that harm public education systems in communities across the state of Missouri.

Modes of Communication—The second major finding, modes of communication, provided insight into the tactics superintendents find most effective in their direct advocacy with state legislators. This finding gave participants an opportunity to respond to the principal research question and each of the sub-questions by speaking of their experiences, their strategic advocacy, and the perceived results of their advocacy. To answer the principal research question about the experiences that public-school superintendents had in their advocacy work, the researcher was able to discern natural correlations between the type of communication a superintendent uses and the efficacy of communication. In response to sub-question one, which asked about the strategies public-school superintendents in Missouri use in their advocacy work, the researcher found that the participants most frequently used phone calls and in-person meetings with legislators. They found these modes of communication more effective than emails or letters. The exception was when participants engaged teacher and community stakeholders in large-volume email and letter-

writing campaigns to catch the attention of their legislators. These responses directly answered sub-question two, which asked how public-school superintendents execute each strategy when advocating for policies and funding that support public education.

In response to sub-question three, which asked how public-school superintendents in Missouri evaluate each strategy employed in their advocacy, the researcher found that large suburban school superintendents had a much more challenging time reaching their elected representatives than their rural counterparts. These two superintendents of large suburban school districts felt that their advocacy efforts were wasted on their elected officials, and they relied heavily on the work of large organizations like Missouri Association of School Administrators (MASA), their boards of education, and business networks like their chambers of commerce to directly advocate for policies that do the least harm, if not benefit public schools in Missouri. The researcher found a sharp contrast between suburban and rural superintendents. Rural superintendents were more easily able to directly engage their elected officials in school ceremonies, board meetings, and one-on-one conversations. Rural superintendents shared they were able to develop relationships that are mutually beneficial to the school and business community.

While any mode of communication may or may not result in legislation that benefits public schools, legislators from rural districts are part of tight-knit communities where public schools are central to social interactions and vital connections between the legislator, the school, and the business community.

Advocacy—The third major finding, advocacy, provided important insights into participants' experiences by delineating between direct and organizational advocacy. Furthermore, this finding illuminated for the researcher what strategies the participants perceived as effective or ineffective methods of advocacy in the current political climate in Missouri. In response to the principal research question, the advocacy experiences of each superintendent were vast and varied. Only one superintendent revealed their distaste for political advocacy; however, they, too, had enjoyed a lengthy career with a wealth of experiences with elected officials that opened doors for advocating for policy and funding that support public education.

Each participant was able to recall a memorable interaction with a legislator during their advocacy work. These experiences ran the gamut. One participant spoke about a legislator who made a commitment to attend a public forum in a school board meeting, but the legislator did not show. Two other participants spoke about the election of former colleagues and students to the state legislature and the value of the relationships they shared with their legislators. The impact of these experiences informed each participant's understanding of how to advocate through organizational or direct means. This information helped the researcher discern that in response to sub-question two, public-school superintendents are keenly aware of the political appetite of their boards of education and their communities. Because of this, the researcher noted that the participants tailored their advocacy to garner the best results for their school

districts while assessing the impact of education legislation on Missouri's public-school systems.

In response to sub-question three, the researcher found that public-school superintendents are well-informed and aware of legislative action that impacts public schools. This awareness allowed them to quickly evaluate and adjust their strategic advocacy when necessary. Furthermore, they were able to employ the resources of their community and business leaders to achieve a better outcome for public-school funding in Missouri.

Representation—The fourth major finding, representation, provided a clear picture of what public-school superintendents face as they fight to keep schools funded and thriving. The responses of all eight participants provided the researcher with insight into the natural correlation between the principal research question and each of the three sub-questions. To answer the principal research question, the strategies used by public-school superintendents when they advocate for policy and funding that support public education are more direct than the researcher anticipated. Three of the eight participants actively engaged in recruiting candidates to run for elected office in Missouri. They work with business networks and outside of their official capacity to find candidates who are retired educators or supportive patrons of the school community. All eight participants make sure to educate their boards of education on legislation and the politics of education. They encourage these locally elected officials to exert pressure on legislators and policymakers for legislation that benefits their school districts and public education across the state. Both sub-question one and sub-

question two are answered through this ad hoc strategy which also keeps superintendents out of the fray of the difficult political climate in the Missouri General Assembly and Senate.

In response to sub-question three, seven of the eight participants felt their school communities and students are underrepresented by elected officials. One participant from a large suburban school district and one rural participant from a medium-size school district in rural Missouri spoke about the potential for egregious marginalization of vulnerable populations of students if the Missouri legislature continues to pass bills that reallocate funds away from public school systems in the state. As they evaluated the strategies most useful to their advocacy work, both participants recognized that their efforts were largely ineffectual with their representatives.

All eight participants recognized that individual efforts are often not enough for effective change in the current political sphere of influence. They all find that organizational advocacy, professional lobbyists, and teachers have a greater voice in education policy. Additionally, all eight participants recognize the need for superintendents across the state to develop grassroots networks of support to more effectively advocate for policies and funding that support public education in Missouri. In this, the researcher found that despite their influence and cunning, public-school superintendents in Missouri felt their voices and the voices of their students and families go unheard by legislators who adopt policies designed to underfund or defund public education in Missouri.

Findings Related to the Literature

Diane Ravitch has made a career of ringing the alarm bell to public school educators about the school reform and school choice movements that seek to defund public schools across the country. The movement began with *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, and every presidential administration since its publication has used public school failure as a foundational pillar of their political platform (Ravitch, 2016). Charter schools and private school voucher systems are a central feature of this. Despite political party, most education policy written by state legislatures come directly from political action committees whose primary focus is to shape public attitudes about public education through negative media coverage and rhetoric that upbraids teachers, administrators, and politicians who support public education (Harvey, et al., 2013). Part of the role of a public-school superintendent is to advocate for policies and funding that support public schools, which Fullan (2003) recognizes as a moral and social imperative in a democratic system of government. The neo-liberal faction of the Missouri legislature rejects that claim by adopting political platforms that openly favor school choice and public funding of private and parochial school options. This is by no means representative of the entire Missouri legislature, but according to Participant A, "they cannot jump the party line."

Led by the literature available on the superintendent's role as an engaged policy advocate, the study sought to answer a principal research question: What are the experiences of public-school superintendents in Missouri in the process of advocating for policy and funding that support public education?

The advocacy role of public-school superintendents is a job so important that it is part of national and state-level professional standards (National Policy Board for Educational Administrators, 2015). The researcher found that public-school superintendents in Missouri are

well-informed and actively engaged in political processes and discourse. They express little reticence to join in overtly political actions reported by Alsbury & Whitaker (2006). This can be attributed to what Irish (2011) and Aleman (2002) recognize as the power of the position itself. Public-school superintendents have a generous sphere of influence (Bjork & Keedy, 2001), and Missouri public-school superintendents who participated in the study expressed a significant amount of influence in their professional networks, business partnerships, and relationships with their boards of education and community stakeholders. They are rich in experience, knowledge, preparation, and keenly aware of place (Aleman, 2002) as defined by their understanding of the geopolitical forces of their legislators and communities.

The experience of Missouri public-school superintendents' makes them effective communicators and helps to build relationships within the political arena. Their influence is an outgrowth of that ability to communicate. The researcher found that public-school superintendents in Missouri have the "power-to" effect change in a democratic system where politics are relational (Ackoff and Rovin, 2003). All the participants recognize this element of political leadership and readily share their experience and knowledge of how to effectively advocate for funding that support public schools.

Bredeson (2007) found that school budgets and finances are the primary concern of every school leader. Funding for public schools is approved by political bodies, who have for the past four decades tied monies to accountability measures. State legislatures across the country have championed privatization efforts that siphon funding for public schools into private hands (Ravitch, 2020). Missouri's longest-serving public school superintendent has worked for 37 years as a public-school superintendent and in the study revealed that the current school choice movement has come full circle. Depending on which political party has control of the

mechanisms of government, the argument against public schools is to divert funds in favor of school choice or to remove funding based on accountability measures (Ravitch, 2016). Both approaches create a perception of scarcity for patrons of public education. It is this perceived competition for resources that politicizes public school funding (Fogarty, 2011).

Sub-question one sought to understand the strategies public-school superintendents in Missouri employ in their advocacy for policy and funding that support public education. A study by Glass and Franceschini (2007) identified interpersonal relationships as superintendents' greatest professional development need. The finding of this study was that the participants' identified their interpersonal relationships as the key to successful advocacy and leadership. While many of these relationships are transactional, Missouri superintendents exhibit the same ties to their communities, personnel, and students reported by Albury & Whitaker in their 2006 study. The participants are driven by relationships, and their experience in developing lasting relationships within their communities creates their sphere of influence, particularly in rural school districts.

The researcher found that while each of the study's eight participants relied on large advocacy organizations to disseminate information about legislation, they also placed a great deal of trust in these networks and organizations to lobby for bills that support public education and against bills that harm public education. The researcher found that it is superintendents in large school districts who are more likely to rely on professional organizations like MASA and MoASBO. This phenomenon is the converse of the Case and King (1985) findings. This study and that of Case and King are separated by 40 years and 1,000 miles; however, the literature revealed that superintendents in Missouri are especially comfortable working in the micropolitical sphere of their own school districts and communities (Hurst, 2017).

Sub-question two explored the ways in which public-school superintendents in Missouri execute each strategy they employ when advocating for policy and funding that support public education. All the participants in the study reported the use of direct engagement with legislators as they advocated for policies and funding that support public schools, but Participant G has the most experience finding funding outside of the traditional, legislated means. This participant unabashedly urges other superintendents to recruit and support pro-education candidates to the legislature and, in doing so, exemplifies the omnicompetence of leadership defined by Ackoff and Rovin (2003).

The researcher found that this kind of direct, community-based strategy garnered tangible examples of the positive impact a public-school superintendent can have when they operate outside of the reform du jour supported by legislators and media outlets. As Fullan (2003) stated, "effective leaders have the capacity to be on the dance floor and the balcony simultaneously," (p. 60). That is to say, the participants of this study who understood the cogs in the legislative machinations actively and effectively engaged community and business stakeholders in advocacy for education policies that support their local school districts.

Sub-question three sought to understand how public-school superintendents in Missouri evaluate each strategy they employed in advocating for policy and funding that support public education. Harvey et al. (2013) asserted that the rhetoric around public education and the subsequent competition for funding that is based on accountability measures leads to "irrelevant policies" that impede the work of school leaders. Accountability measures are out of fashion, but the rhetoric against funding public schools is an impediment to the work of educators in Missouri. Current efforts to defund Missouri schools are focused on tax cuts. One legislator has sought to abolish all property taxes in St. Charles County which would create a $20 million

deficit for school districts in the region (Participant F). In September 2022, Governor Parson called a special session of the legislature to consider a series of tax credits and tax cuts that would impact public services, roads, bridges, and schools (Kellogg, 2022).

It is because of measures like this that Fogarty (2011), Bredeson (2007), and Ravitch (2016) all call on school leaders and school superintendents to engage with legislators to advocate for policies and funding that support student success and learning. The participants of this study echo the authors' call to action. The researcher found that participants perceive their efforts to use direct advocacy as a strategy to provoke change in legislative policies are ineffective, if not abject failures.

Part of any educational reform effort is the rhetoric of American failure. The participants believe it is up to superintendents across the state of Missouri to unify their message and deliver it consistently to change the narrative of public education. This may be the Achilles heel of public-school superintendents. The literature indicates that mass media outlets look to those who are professional advocates rather than experts in educational research, management, or experience to provide context and commentary on educational reform efforts (Malin & Lubienski, 2015). None of the participants mentioned their ability or willingness to state their advocacy goals through a press conference or junket.

The participants' greatest influence lies in the micropolitical sphere where they can engage with community and business leaders whose children attend public schools (Participant G). The success of a superintendent can be evaluated by the results of their work (Aleman, 2002). Participants A and F both believe that successful communities have successful schools.

Conclusions

Because public schools are so inextricably tied to tax-payer monies, it creates a difficult environment for superintendents to strategize successful means of advocacy. Participant A recognized that public education is the "longest arm of government" and has the most significant daily impact on the lives of citizens. Public-school superintendents in Missouri are profoundly aware that they serve their communities and schools at the pleasure of their boards of education; however, the participants of this study are reliant on their board of education members to advocate where they cannot and are protective of them. They view themselves not as extensions of a political agenda but as "stewards" (Participant A) of their school districts in every realm of democratic leadership (Howlett, 1993).

Implications for Action

The responses of the participants regarding their experiences as advocates for public education supported the research literature; however, the interview process demonstrated that this sample of public-school superintendents in Missouri are much less hesitant to engage with state-level politicians than was expected. Of the eight participants, only one responded that they were not very engaged in the politics of education, but all the participants understand the current political climate in Missouri and the necessity of their advocacy. All the participants stated that their time is limited and so they rely on professional lobbyists in the professional organizations to which they belong to do the heavy lifting of advocacy. Rural districts do not have the personnel who can take on the bulk of their advocacy, and large suburban districts do not have the influence one might expect to effectively advocate or lobby for policies and funding that support public schools in Missouri.

All the participants are members of their local chambers of commerce. They reported unanimously that cultivating relationships among the business community creates an opportunity for them to give voice to their concerns about legislation and policies that will negatively impact schools and the communities they serve. Chambers of commerce and other economic development organizations across the state have legislative platforms. In the intensely partisan political climate of Missouri politics, the legislative platforms of community and business networks have the capacity to garner more meaningful results than superintendents and other school district personnel who use direct advocacy. Often, they can say what public-school superintendents cannot. Because these business organizations are job creators in the state, they may have more power to influence legislators who have taken up the school choice mantel.

Public-school superintendents and other school leaders can directly engage with their legislators; however, the results of their engagement and advocacy appear diminished to seven of the participants. Participant G, who was the outlier in this study, provided the example of how to focus advocacy efforts closer to home by partnering with local healthcare networks for job training opportunities, finding alternative means to fund infrastructure repairs that benefit the community, and how to recruit candidates who support public schools. In short, public-school superintendents need to actively seek to become an integral part of the business networks in their communities. Communities thrive when businesses thrive, and this feeds directly back into the public school system (Participant F). This micropolitical sphere of influence is much more strategic and purposeful than any effort by a single superintendent to engage with lawmakers and policymakers in Missouri.

As public-school superintendents seek business and community partnerships, they should actively engage their boards of education and their teachers to directly lobby elected representatives and other policymakers to pass legislation that supports public school systems across the state. Participants A, F, and H reported that teachers and teacher organizations in Missouri have retained a great deal of power in the state. This strategy in and of itself creates the unified message all eight participants spoke about during their interviews.

Finally, public-school superintendents have the power to influence pro-public education community members to run for elected office. While they cannot endorse a candidate professionally, they can personally recruit and endorse candidates who support public education. It is easy to assume that community stakeholders, boards of education, and business partners have no appetite for politics; however, Participant G asserted that waiting until one is elected is too late to advocate for public-education causes, and this type of action is defined by Maldanado (2007) as part and parcel of the political activity public-school superintendents in his study engaged in.

Recommendations for Future Research

The strategic advocacy and experiences of public-school superintendents were detailed through the course of eight interviews. The participants were chosen according to their geopolitical location to represent the whole of that region. The sample is too small to make any generalized statements about the effectiveness of superintendents' advocacy work or to delineate the impact of geopolitical forces on public-school policy. Future research should be conducted to explore whether geopolitical placement influences a public-school superintendent's ability to advocate for policy and funding that

supports public schools in Missouri. Additionally, there are more than 500 public school districts in Missouri and a quantitative study may illicit a political theory about the politics of the superintendency.

The limitations of the study did not allow for the researcher to also interview legislators or other elected officials about their experiences with public-school superintendents. Further research should include a mixed-methods study of multiple populations of school leaders, state and local legislators, and community leaders to document the efficacy of various modes of communication superintendents use in their advocacy. Additionally, a twin study should be used to explore the experiences of board of education members in their advocacy work with state-level policymakers and legislators.

Remarks on the future of advocacy

Advocacy work in the future should be included in the strategic plans of every Missouri public school district. All Missouri schools are tasked with completing new strategic plans for the next two-year accreditation cycle. The Missouri School Improvement Plan 6 (MSIP6) provides superintendents and boards of education a significant opportunity to establish advocacy as quantifiable goals within the context of their strategic plans. The current political climate led one participant to surmise that the future of advocacy for school leaders is, at best, bleak; however, strategic plans lay out specific goals that school districts need to achieve and can provide an important gauge of the effectiveness of advocacy and determine the appetite for such work in the community. This sort of action may give school districts and large professional organizations to which school leaders belong a scaffold to build durable political platforms that shape policy and

assure that Missouri public schools are fully funded. This scaffold is necessary to safeguard student learning and success as the system moves further into the 21st century.

Concluding Remarks

Missouri public-school superintendents are knowledgeable and politically engaged leaders whose purpose is to create environments where students find success. They are deeply committed to their communities and work to assure their school districts are well funded, so they remain a central feature of thriving communities. The superintendents who participated in this study were open and realistic about the level of influence they have over policy and funding that support their school districts. They value relationships and work on behalf of their students, boards of education, and community stakeholders to provide educational opportunities despite the efforts of an often-adversarial legislature; however, they need the support of the same communities they serve to see them through the political storm. Superintendents across the state know that advocacy for policies and funding is not done in a vacuum, and the Missouri legislature has an opportunity to recommit itself to the democratic principles of public education so that the public-school community can flourish.

References

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. (1983). American Education, 19(5), 2–3.

Adams, T. R. (1992). *Perceptions and expectations of selected Missouri legislators, school board presidents, superintendents, and teachers: Who influences decision-making in Missouri public schools?* (Order No. 9239696). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (304023187).

Aleman, D. M., Jr. (2002). *The political sophistication of district-transforming superintendents* (Order No. 3101192). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (305511368).

Alsbury, T. L. 1. T. ed., & Whitaker, K. S. (2007). Superintendent perspectives and practice of accountability, democratic voice and social justice. *Journal of educational administration*, 45(2), 154–174. https://doi-org.bakeru.idm.oclc.org/10.1108/09578230710732943

Björk, L. G., Browne-Ferrigno, T., & Kowalski, T. J. (2014). *The superintendent and educational reform in the United States of America. Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 13(4), 444–465. https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2014.945656

Bjork, L. G., & Keedy, J. (2001). Politics and the Superintendency in the U.S.A.: Restructuring In-Service Education. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 27(2), 275–302.

Blanden, E. (1998). *Policymaking and policy-administering perceptions of school board presidents and superintendents in selected Wisconsin school districts* (Order No. 9834162). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (304463943). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Blissett, R. S. L. (2017). *The ideological politics of charter schools* (Order No. 10758553).

    Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social

    Sciences Collection. (2014462132). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2019*). Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map

    from beginning to end*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

B. R. (1987). A first: School aid is set at $1 billion*. Education week*, 6(39), 18.

Bredeson, P. V., & Kose, B. W. (2007). *Responding to the education reform agenda: A study of

    school superintendents' instructional leadership*. Education Policy Analysis

    Archives, 15(5), 1–26.

Brewer, C., Knoeppel, R. C., & Lindle, J. C. (2014). Consequential validity of accountability

    policy. *Educational Policy*, *29*(5), 711–745. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904813518099

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Opinion; May 17, 1954; Records of the Supreme Court

    of the United States; Record Group 267; National Archives.

Callahan, R. E., & Washington Univ., S. L. M. G. I. of E. (1966). *The Superintendent of Schools-

    -A Historical Analysis.*

Casalaspi, D. (2017). The making of a "legislative miracle": The elementary and secondary

    education act of 1965. *History of Education Quarterly*, 57(2), 247–277.

    https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2017.4

Case, E. J., & King, R. A. (1985). *Influencing state fiscal policymaking: The superintendent as

    lobbyist.* Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Chicago,

    Illinois.

Charter School History: MU Office of Charter School Operations. (2018, July 9). Retrieved from

    https://musponsorship.missouri.edu/what-we-do/charter-school-history/

Coffin, S. V. (2020). *State policy determinants of charter school market share* (Order No. 27668196). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (2426148905).

Chojnacki, M. J. (1992*). A study of the lobbying strategies utilized by superintendents in Ohio as perceived by state legislators and superintendents* (Order No. 9310072). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (304004373). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Crowley, C. B. (2015). *Profiting in education: Politics, markets, and the public good* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison). doi:10134211

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018*). Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Fifth edition. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Curtis, B. (2016). Priority, politics and pedagogical science. *Paedagogica historica*, 52(6), 674–688. https://doi-org.bakeru.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/00309230.2016.1205637

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. (2021, May 26). Retrieved November 15, 2020, from https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/

Fogarty, J. (2011). *Political activity as advocacy: Through the eyes of the Illinois superintendent* (Doctoral dissertation, Loyola University, 2011) (pp. 1-225). Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest LLC. doi:3454996

Fullan, P. M. (2010). *Moral imperative of school leadership*. Corwin Press.

Glass, T. E., Björk Lars, & Brunner, C. C. (2000*). The study of the American school superintendency: A look at the superintendent of education in the new millennium.* American Association of School Administrators.

Glass, Thomas E. & Franceschini, Louis A.; American Association of School Administrators (2007). *The state of the American school superintendency: A mid-decade study*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Harvey, J., & Ansingh, P. J. (2013). *The superintendent's field book: A guide for leaders of learning*. Corwin.

H.R.1 - 107th Congress (2001-2002): No child left behind act (n.d.). Retrieved August 3, 2022, from https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/1/text

Hurst, T. M. (2017). *The superintendent's feed: An analysis of superintendents' engagement in political discourse on Twitter* (Order No. 10628838). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (1923046742). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Irish, E. E. (2011). *The deep slumber of decided opinion': How teachers and school administrators understand controversial issues policy* (dissertation). University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

St. Louis Public Radio | By Sarah Kellogg. (2022, September 14). *Missouri special session starts with a wide range of proposals*. STLPR. Retrieved September 18, 2022, from https://news.stlpublicradio.org/government-politics-issues/2022-09-14/missouri-special-session-starts-with-a-wide-range-of-proposals

Knapke, J. O. (1986). *The political role of selected school superintendents in state-level educational policymaking in Ohio* (Order No. 8622290). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (303469821).

Lizotte, C. (2012). *The children of choice: Public education reform and the evolution of neoliberal governance* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Washington). Retrieved August 18, 2019, from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.456.9126&rep=rep1&type=pd

Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2008). *Writing a successful thesis or dissertation: Tips and strategies for students in the Social and Behavioral Sciences.* Corwin.

Maldonado, D. (2007). *Working with the state legislature: What Texas school superintendents are doing* (Order No. 3263292). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (304850512).

Malin, J. R., & Lubienski, C. (2015, January 26). *Educational expertise, advocacy, and media influence*. Education Policy Analysis Archives. Retrieved August 2, 2021, from https://eric.ed.gov/*?id=EJ1051683*

McCarthy, M. H. (2011). Superintendents' perceptions of the role and goal of global education in the 21st century and the ways superintendents shape programs and policies to implement global education: A case study of three Massachusetts superintendents and their K-12 districts (Order No. 3462585). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (878552920).

McCarty, D. J., & Ramsey, C. E. (1971). *The school managers: Power and conflict in American public education*. Greenwood Publishing Corporation.

Merrifield, J. (2019). *School system reform: Why and how is a price-less tale*. Covenant Books, Inc.

Meyers, E. F. (2013*). An examination of the influence of political culture on education policy in Louisiana during periods of systemic reform in K–12 public education* (Order No. 3557892). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (1347623304).

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). Student Statistics. *Missouri Education Dashboard*. Retrieved August 1, 2021, from https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Visualizations.aspx?id=22

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2013, June). *Missouri superintendent standards*. Retrieved February 3, 2021, from https://dese.mo.gov/sites/default/files/SuperintendentStandards.pdf

Missouri Education Dashboard. DESE web log in. (n.d.). Retrieved January 27, 2022, from https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/Visualizations.aspx?id=22

Missouri Secretary of State - IT. (n.d.). *District maps*. Missouri State Seal. Retrieved August 1, 2022, from https://www.sos.mo.gov/elections/s_default/maps

n.a (2020). "The Coronavirus spring: The historic closing of US schools (a timeline). *Education week*. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-coronavirus-spring-the-historic-closing-of-u-s-schools-a-timeline/2020/07 access 1.5.2021

Gaulden, N., & Stacey, D. (2020, March 11). MNEA Capital Action Day, 2020. personal.

Oakley, D. L. (2015*). Illinois public school superintendents: Influencing state-level education legislation and policymaking in Illinois* (Order No. 3689161). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (1678947569). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-

com.bakeru.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/illinois-public-school-

superintendents/docview/1678947569/se-2

Phillips, C. A. (1911). *A history of education in Missouri: The Essential Facts Concerning the history and Organization of Missouri's schools.* Stephens.

Pineo-Jensen, S. (2013). *An informed electorate: The relationship between the standardization of public education and voter participation* (Order No. 3589550). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (1430909861). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Politics and Pedagogy. (1886*). Journal of education*, 24(8), 148–149. Retrieved from https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true &db=eue&AN=21636034&site=ehost-live

Ponessa, J. (1998). Vestiges of desegregation. *Education Week*, 17(17), 190.

Portz, J. (2000). Supporting education reform: Mayoral and corporate paths. *Urban Education*, 35(4), 396. https://doi-org.bakeru.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0042085900354002

Professional standards for educational leaders 2015. Wallace Foundation. (n.d.). Retrieved August 2, 2022, from https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/professional-standards-for-educational-leaders-2015.aspx

Ravitch, D. (2020). *Slaying Goliath: The impassioned fight to defeat the privatization movement and save America's public schools*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Ravitch, D. (2016). *The death and life of the great American school system how testing and choice are undermining education*. Basic Books.

Rhim, L. M. (2002). *School privatization by way of a comprehensive management contract: A single case study of the extent to which privatization theory transfers to practice in a public charter school*.

Rooks, Noliwe. *Cutting school: The segrenomics of American education.* The New Press. (Original work published 2017).

Rowe II, R. K. (2010). Beyond equality and adequacy: Equal protection, tax assessments, and the Missouri public school funding dilemma. *Missouri Law Review*, 75(3), 1037–1066.

Saltman, K. J. (1999*). Collateral damage: Public school privatization and the threat to democracy* (Order No. 9938054). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (304518922). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Saltman, Kenneth (2018). *The politics of education: A critical introduction* (2nd ed). Routledge. (Original work published 2014: Paradigm).

Shields, C. M. (2017). Is transformative leadership practical or possible? Learning from superintendents about social justice. *International studies in educational administration* (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management (CCEAM)), 45(2), 3–20.

Stralek, L. (2018). *Politics and education reform from 1965 to 2016* (Order No. 10787064). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (2054024760).

Strauss, Valerie (2020). *The Washington post.* "Schools start closing--or delay reopening—as

    Covid 19 cases jump across the country. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/

    2020/11/14/schools-start-closing-or-delay-reopening-covid-19-cases-jump-across-

    country/access 7.9.2021

The elementary and secondary education act of 1965 (1965). bill. Retrieved 2020, from

    https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-79/pdf/STATUTE-79-

    Pg27.pdf#page=1.

The Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). (n.d.). *ISLLC Standards 2015*

    Standard Six guideline for political advocacy. Retrieved February 3, 2021, from

    http://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7566/urlt/0075311-orgstand.pdf

The NCES Fast Facts Tool provides quick answers to many education questions (National

    Center for Education Statistics). (n.d.). Retrieved August 22, 2021, from

    http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/

Tonn, J. L. (2006). There is such a thing as a free (and reduced) lunch. *Education week*, 26(5),

    21.

Walsh, C. E. (2013). *Universal preK: How do policymakers make meaning of their decision*

    making in public education reform policy? (Order No. 3550292). Available from

    ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences

    Collection. (1285528224).

Woods, R. A., Jr. (2017). *Missouri legislator and administrator perceptions of federal government involvement in education* (Order No. 10634291). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection; Publicly Available Content Database. (1976992953). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/missouri-legislator-administrator-perceptions/docview/1976992953/se-2

Young, S. D. (2018). *School leaders' levels of political engagement with the policy environments surrounding their professional roles* (Order No. 10845389). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (2117678057). https://bakeru.idm.oclc.org/login

Appendices

Appendix A

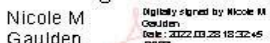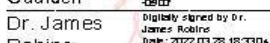# IRB Request Form

BAKER UNIVERSITY

IRB Request

Date __3/28/2022__   IRB Protocol Number _____
    (IRB use only)

I. Research Investigator(s) (students must list faculty sponsor)

Department(s) __Graduate Education__

Name	Signature	
1. Nicole Gaulden	Nicole M Gaulden (Digitally signed by Nicole M Gaulden Date: 2022.03.28 18:32:45 -05'00')	Principal Investigator
2. Dr. James Robins	Dr. James Robins (Digitally signed by Dr. James Robins Date: 2022.03.28 18:33:04 -05'00')	☑ Check if faculty sponsor
3. Dr. Li Chen-Bouk		☑ Check if faculty sponsor
4.		☐ Check if faculty sponsor

Principal investigator contact information   Phone   **(816) 591-5421**

Note: When submitting your finalized, signed form to the IRB, please ensure that you cc all investigators and faculty sponsors using their official Baker University (or respective organization's) email addresses.

Email   NicoleMGaulden@stu.bakeru.edu

Address   **2421 NE 2nd Terrace**

Blue Springs, MO 64014

Faculty sponsor contact information   Phone

Email   James.Robins@bakeru.edu

Expected Category of Review: ☐ Exempt   ☐ Expedited   ☑ Full   ☐ Renewal

II. Protocol Title

The Political Behavior and Strategic Advocacy of Missouri Public-School Superintendents

Baker IRB Submission form page 1 of 4

D. Will the subjects be deceived or misled in any way? If so, include an outline or script of the debriefing.

The subject will not be deceived or misled in any way. All interview questions will be open-ended and any follow-up questions will be asked only when clarification of responses is necessary to assure accurate reporting of the subjects viewpoints.

E. Will there be a request for information which subjects might consider to be personal or sensitive? If so, please include a description.

Superintendents will be identified only by a designated label or pseudonym (e.g. Subject A, Subject B) and no personal or sensitive information will be gathered or shared. School districts will be similarly identified only by a designated label or pseudonym (e.g. District A, District B). Only vague regional or geographic information will be included as a descriptor of the school district community.

F. Will the subjects be presented with materials which might be considered to be offensive, threatening, or degrading? If so, please describe.

Subjects will not be presented with materials which might be considered offensive, threatening, or degrading to themselves, their school districts, or their communities.

G. Approximately how much time will be demanded of each subject?

Each subject will be required to spend 45-60 minutes in an online interview using Zoom.

H. Who will be the subjects in this study? How will they be solicited or contacted? Provide an outline or script of the information which will be provided to subjects prior to their volunteering to participate. Include a copy of any written solicitation as well as an outline of any oral solicitation.

Subjects in this study will be public-school superintendents in Missouri selected from each of the eight Congressional regions in the state. Subjects will be first contacted by email with attachments that include a consent form to participate in the study. The consent form provides the researcher permission to interview, record, and present findings in this dissertation, and it includes a statement that participation in the study is voluntary. Subjects will have the option to refuse participation (see Question I). The email will also include a summary of the research including the purpose of the study, a statement of the expected duration of the interview (45-60 minutes), as well as a list of procedures for the interview including a link to signupgenie.com to schedule interviews at the

I. What steps will be taken to insure that each subject's participation is voluntary? What if any inducements will be offered to the subjects for their participation?

To ensure that each subject's participation is voluntary, each subject will be invited to participate in the study in an initial email and in a follow-up phone call. The email will include an attached consent form to participate in the study, a summary of the research, the purpose of the study, and information regarding the time necessary to complete the interview. The email will also have attached a list of procedures to schedule an interview, and information regarding the Zoom platform and recording. Subjects who choose to participate in the study will be sent an Outlook invitation for the agreed upon interview time. The invitation will include a Zoom link for the agreed upon interview time. Subjects who choose not to participate will not be included in any portion of the study and

Baker IRB Submission form page 3 of 4

III. **Summary**:

The following questions must be answered. Be specific about exactly what participants will experience and about the protections that have been included to safeguard participants from harm.

A. In a sentence or two, please describe the background and purpose of the research.
The purpose of the study was to explore the extent to which Missouri public-school superintendents are involved in political advocacy to secure policies and funding that benefit students in the education systems they lead. The study explored the strategies superintendents use to advocate for legislative policies that secure funding that supports public education. Moreover, the study explored superintendents' self-reflective evaluations of their advocacy work. It offered insight into their perceptions of political advocacy and the strategies used to secure necessary policies and funding that ensure student success in the public school system.

B. Briefly describe each condition, manipulation, or archival data set to be included within the study.
There will be no conditions, manipulations, or archival data sets included within the study.

IV. **Protocol Details**

A. What measures or observations will be taken in the study? If any questionnaire or other instruments are used, provide a brief description and attach a copy.

Subjects will respond to a set of open-ended interview questions. A brief questionnaire of the subjects' years of teaching and administrative experience, school district size using Missouri State High School Activities Association conference class designation (e.g. 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, etc.), and membership in professional advocacy organizations like the Missouri School Administrators Association (MSAA) will be noted for the study. No other instruments will be used.

B. Will the subjects encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk? If so, please describe the nature of the risk and any measures designed to mitigate that risk.
The subjects will not encounter the risk of psychological, social, physical, or legal risk for their participation in the study.

C. Will any stress to subjects be involved? If so, please describe.

The subjects will not be subjected to any stress related to their participation in the study.

J. How will you insure that the subjects give their consent prior to participating? Will a written consent form be used? If so, include the form. If not, explain why not.

To ensure subjects give consent prior to participating, written consent forms will be emailed to subjects along with documents that include the purpose of the study, procedural information regarding the interview, and other pertinent information outlined in Questions H and I. These consent forms will be filed in electronic format and stored on the researcher's external hard drive and will be password protected. These recorded interviews will also be stored on the researcher's personal external hard drive and will be password protected. All documents will be stored thusly for a period of five years following completion of the study.

K. Will any aspect of the data be made a part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject? If so, please explain the necessity.

No aspect of the data will be made part of any permanent record that can be identified with the subject. All recorded interviews and identifying information will be stored on the researcher's personal external hard drive and will be password protected.

L. Will the fact that a subject did or did not participate in a specific experiment or study be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer? If so, explain.

No information about a subject's participation or non-participation in the study will be made part of any permanent record available to a supervisor, teacher, or employer.

M. What steps will be taken to insure the confidentiality of the data? Where will it be stored? How long will it be stored? What will be done with the data after the study is completed?

All data will be filed electronically on the researcher's personal external hard drive until the study is completed. At the time of completion, all hard copy data (including the researcher's notes) will be digitized and stored on the researcher's personal external hard drive and all remaining hard copies of data and research notes will be shredded. Following the study's completion, the researcher will gather all electronic and digitized files into a compressed zip file and archive the data file on a separate password-protected thumb drive where it will be archived for a period of five years. Original electronic and digitized files will be deleted from the researcher's personal external hard drive.

N. If there are any risks involved in the study, are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society?

There are no risks involved in the study to the subjects or researcher, nor are there any offsetting benefits that might accrue to either the subjects or society.

O. Will any data from files or archival data be used? If so, please describe.

No data from files or archival data will be used.

Baker IRB Submission form page 4 of 4

Appendix B.

Letter of Approval to Conduct Research

Baker University Institutional Review Board
April 6th, 2022

Dear Nicole Gaulden and Jim Robins,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:
1) Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2) Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3) When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4) If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5) If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.
6) If this project is not completed within a year, you must renew IRB approval.

If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

Nathan Poell, MLS
Chair, Baker University IRB
 Baker University IRB Committee
        Sara Crump, PhD
        Nick Harris, MS
        Christa Hughes, PhD
        Susan Rogers, PhD

Appendix C.

Invitation to Participants

My name is Nicole Gaulden, and I am a teacher in an alternative high school program in the Kansas City area. I am working to complete my dissertation for my doctorate in Educational Leadership through Baker University. My dissertation topic is the strategic advocacy of public-school superintendents for policies and legislation that support Missouri public schools. I am seeking public-school superintendents in the state who are currently serving to participate in the study. The goal of the study is to discern public-school superintendents' views on their advocacy work and the methods used to accomplish their advocacy goals.

If you choose to participate in the study, you will have a 45–60-minute Zoom interview scheduled at your convenience. You will be presented five questions about your strategic advocacy. Following the interview, you will have the opportunity to review your interview responses after they are transcribed through a member check protocol.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please take a few minutes to click the link listed below my email signature and contact information. The link will take you to SignUpGenius.com which provides a list of possible dates and times to schedule your interview. Once you have chosen a time, please add it to your calendar. My Zoom ID is provided in your time slot. You can get to it by clicking the video recorder icon. I will contact you again via email once you have signed up for an interview only to confirm that I have you scheduled.

Lastly, attached to this email you will find a consent form for participation, the purpose and significance of the study as presented in Chapter 3 of my dissertation, and a copy of my IRB approval letter from Baker University. My contact information is listed below. If you require any other documentation, I am happy to provide that to you.

As you are aware, we are in unprecedented times and the work you do as a school leader is important. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to talking with you.

Nicole Gaulden
Baker K-12 Leadership DED
Cohort 22
NicoleMGaulden@stu.bakeru.edu
(816) 591-███

https://www.signupgenius.com ████████████████████

Appendix D

Letter of Consent

Research Title: *The Political Behavior and Strategic Advocacy of Missouri Public-School*

Superintendents

Researcher: Nicole Gaulden

Advisor: Dr. James Robins

School of Education

Baker University

8001 College Blvd.

Overland Park, KS 66210

jrob█████████████

My name is Nicole Gaulden, and I am a doctoral student at Baker University. I am conducting research on the strategic advocacy employed by Missouri public-school superintendents as they work to assure policies and funding that support Missouri public schools.

You will be asked five questions about your advocacy work, the arenas in which you advocate, your perceptions of your advocacy work, and your experiences in working with state-level policymakers and legislators. You may decline to answer any question at any time, and you may discontinue your participation in the study at any time and for any reason.

For the purposes of the study, all personally identifiable information about yourself and your school district will be kept confidential. Both the school district and you will be assigned a pseudonym. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed, and you will have the opportunity to perform a member check to review your interview transcript to assure your data is accurate.

<u>Consent to Participate</u>:

I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary. I also understand

that I can discontinue my participation in the study at any time and for any reason. I understand

that the principal researcher can be contacted at <u>NicoleMGaulden@stu.bakeru.edu</u> should I have

any questions or wish to discontinue my participation.

I have read and understand the above statement. By signing, I agree to participate in the

research study. The Baker University Institutional Review Board approved this study on April 6,

2022, and it will expire on April 6, 2023, unless renewal is obtained by the review board.

Participant Signature _____   Date _____

Appendix E.

Interview Protocol

Opening Statement

Welcome to our interview session and thank you for your time today. I am Nicole Gaulden, and I am a doctoral student at Baker University. I currently serve as a teacher in an alternative high school program in the Kansas City metropolitan area. I am happy to speak with you today. The goal of this study is to explore the strategic advocacy of public-school superintendents in Missouri whose districts are impacted by current charter-school legislation and the effect it has in securing funding for public schools.

The interview session will take 30-60 minutes, and it will be recorded for data analysis purposes. The recording will be available only to myself and my research committee. Your participation is confidential and no identifying information related to you or your school will be used in the reporting of data collected. You will be assigned an alphabetical pseudonym for use throughout the study.

The interview will consist of several questions regarding the strategies you use in your advocacy work that supports public school funding. You may decline to answer all or part of any question at any time. Following our interview, the recorded session will be transcribed, and I will provide a transcript of the interview with your responses to check for accuracy. If needed, you will have the opportunity to make corrections.

During any point in the interview if you want to end the interview or choose not to participate in the study, any information or data collected through the interview will not be used in the study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

1. Based on your experience, what is your understanding of advocacy for policies and funding that support public schools in Missouri?

   a. Follow up: For school leaders in your position, what is the importance of advocating for policies and funding that support public schools?

   b. Follow up: Have you ever been hesitant to directly lobby or advocate for a bill in legislation that impacts funding that supports public schools? If so, why did you feel hesitant?

2. When advocating for policies and funding that support public schools, leaders use various kinds of strategies. Examples of these strategies include phone calls or emails to legislators, invitations to hold coffees with legislators or board members who can talk with school and community stakeholders, working with advocacy agencies like MNEA or MASA during political action days at the Capitol, and testifying in front of the House or Senate Education Committee. What strategies do you use when advocating for policies and funding that support your schools?

   a. Follow up: When they mention a strategy, follow up with: What did you do to execute the strategy?

   b. Follow up: Among the strategies you mentioned, which of these strategies garner the best results? Why do you think they are the most effective ones?

   c. Follow up: Among all the strategies you mentioned, which of these strategies are the least effective? Why do you think so?

3. How do you use strategic planning to achieve your advocacy goals for policy and funding that support public schools?

a. Follow up: How do you interact with your board of education to set advocacy goals?

b. Follow up: How involved are other stakeholders in your strategic planning?

4. Describe a memorable interaction you had when working with a legislator as an advocate for public school policies and funding that support your school district.

a. Follow-up: What is your overall feeling when you look back at this interaction?

b. Follow-up: What were the positive takeaways from this interaction?

c. Follow up: What were the negative takeaways from this interaction?

d. Follow-up: What did you learn through these experiences and how have they shaped your current view of advocacy?

5. Based on your experiences in advocating for public schools, what do you think is the future for advocacy work by superintendents and other school leaders who want to impact legislation for funding and policies that benefit public schools in Missouri?

a. Follow-up: What is something you think is important for future school leaders and educators to know about political advocacy at the local and state levels?

b. Follow-up: How do you see the superintendent's advocacy strategies changing to meet future challenges?

Closing Statement

That concludes our interview. The interview will be transcribed, and you will receive a copy of the transcript within two weeks for your review to assure the accuracy of your responses. I want to take this opportunity to thank you again for your time and for your participation in this study. If at any time you have questions or would like to see the results of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me at NicoleMGaulden@stu.bakeru.edu.

Appendix F: Follow-up Email to Participants for Member-Check

Nicole M Gaulden

From:	Nicole M Gaulden
Sent:	Wednesday, ███████████████
To:	███████
Subject:	Member check - Interview transcript
Attachments:	███████████████

Dear ████████

Attached you will find the unedited transcript of our interview on ██████████ Within the document, you will see a few places where identifying information of your school district or community is redacted, and an area highlighted for clarification. As you perform your member check, please feel free to add comments for clarification or accuracy where they are needed and return the corrected document to me at your earliest convenience.

I want to thank you again for participating in this study. Your time is valuable, and I appreciate your willingness to share some of it with me. As always, if you have questions or require additional information from me, I am happy to provide that to you. My contact information is listed below.

Many thanks,

Nicole Watkins Gaulden
NicoleMGaulden@stu.bakeru.edu
████████████