THE ROLE OF THE ILLINOIS SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT IN COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE STUDY

BY

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DISSEDITION

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Abstract

Standards-based curricular reform is at the forefront of change in the American public education system. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a new set of learning standards in English and mathematics, have become the new bar for students in the vast majority of the nation’s public schools. While scholars and practitioners debate the merits of the CCSS, educators have been faced with the challenge of implementing them in the classroom. This challenge is particularly acute for school superintendents. Scholarship has suggested that transition to standards-based models like the CCSS will challenge school leaders to restructure school organizations, facilitate change, and foster knowledge- and skill-building activities (Vogel, 2010).

To deeply examine the leadership practices and behaviors of successful superintendent leadership in this domain, this case study examined the leadership of one Illinois school district superintendent with a reputation for exceptional leadership for CCSS implementation in her school district. Three research questions framed this study: (a) in what behaviors and activities does an effective superintendent engage, as they lead the implementation of the CCSS; (b) how does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS; and (c) what challenges did the superintendent face as they worked to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS? To guide data collection and analysis, this research utilized a conceptual framework founded on tenants of policy implementation theory, distributed leadership, and leadership for learning.
Findings revealed that the superintendent engaged in four primary behaviors that supported effective CCSS implementation: facilitating collaboration, assessing the school district’s capacity for implementation, demonstrating a deep understanding of the CCSS, and providing/coordinating professional development and instructional coaching.

Findings also evidenced a distributed approach to leadership for CCSS implementation from the superintendent. The superintendent facilitated collaboration, engaged stakeholder’s in efforts to learn about the CCSS together, facilitated and monitored goal setting for implementation of the CCSS, and provided and protected time necessary for teachers to plan for implementation of the CCSS. Even though these leadership behaviors were reported to be associated with a positive CCSS implementation result in the study school district, challenges remained. The need for effective communication, more professional development, and attention to teacher stress were all noted to be areas that presented challenges for the superintendent.

Implications from this study focused on the superintendent coordinating distributed leadership, deliberately engaging with internal school district stakeholders, and practicing tenants of the leadership for learning framework. Multiple recommendations for further study, development of policy, and professional practice are presented to advance effective leadership practices for implementation of the CCSS.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

The march toward a national set of curricular standards has been in constant motion for over 30 years. In 1983, publication of *A Nation at Risk* asserted the United States public education system had succumbed to a “rising tide of mediocrity” (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983, p. 5). According to this report, mediocrity threatened the geopolitical and economic dominance of the United States, and supporters of the report asserted that weak academic standards were to blame (Kirst & Wirt, 2004; NCEE, 1983). This document touched off decades of standards-based curricular reforms in which being clear about what students should know at specified grade levels, incorporating modes of assessment designed to measure student progress in comparison with those goals, and holding educators accountable for ensuring students meet learning targets have become commonplace (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Porter, Polikoff, & Smithson, 2009). Support for standards-based reforms largely has been situated in political and policy-making discourse, while scholarly support for the efficacy of academic standard setting is comparatively thin (Mathis, 2010). Still, the dominant political ideology asserts that if high standards are set for American public education students, comparatively high achievement will follow.

The proliferation of standards-based reforms in public education has created a shift in focus for those charged with leading public schools. Educators in formal leadership roles in schools—especially school superintendents—gradually have had their role transformed from one in which they were primarily concerned with buffering the
system to one in which they are responsible for spurring instructional reforms and organizational change (Elmore, 2000; Kowalski, 2006). Standards-based reforms, with their focus on learning targets determined in settings far removed from the implementing school systems, challenge the loosely coupled structure through which school organizations traditionally have functioned. These reforms have made guiding instructional and organizational change difficult for school leaders (Elmore, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1983; Rowan, 1990; Swanson & Stevenson, 2002; Weick, 1976).

The current iteration of the standards movement, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), compounds this challenge because it replaces disparate state-derived curricular standards with national standards developed in settings even more far removed from the implementing school sites. Even the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, which was responsible for the most stringent set of federal accountability measures placed on public schools before the CCSS, allowed states to retain authority for the development and adoption of their own state-derived standards (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Yell & Drasgow, 2005).

**Statement of the Problem**

As the CCSS have become a reality for public school systems, superintendents must adapt their leadership behaviors to this significant challenge. Three decades of standards-based education reforms have oriented the nation’s schools toward the importance of aligning school practice to standards for academic achievement, and there is little indication this trend will shift in the future (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Mathis, 2010).
Scholarship has suggested that transition to a standards-based model will challenge school leaders to restructure school organizations, facilitate the change process on macro and micro levels, and facilitate knowledge- and skill-building activities to ensure those charged with delivering standards-based education are appropriately prepared to do so (Vogel, 2010). To guide their practice, superintendents need a leadership framework upon which to ensure standards are understood and implemented within their districts in a manner that brings together the visions of those creating the standards with those charged to implement them.

Several frameworks—distributed leadership, leadership for learning, and policy implementation—demonstrate promise for assisting superintendents in their leadership efforts. Set apart, each offers an incomplete lens through which to focus leadership for CCSS implementation. When combined, however, these frameworks suggest a promising framework for effective leadership for CCSS implementation. Scholarship is needed to understand how the frameworks articulate as school district superintendents work to lead CCSS implementation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand how one successful school district superintendent effectively led for CCSS implementation. Scholarship has suggested that distributed leadership offers a promising framework for leadership for standards-based reform (Harris, 2006a). However, research on distributed leadership typically is divorced from specific policy prescriptions (Youngs, 2009) and primarily has focused at the school
level rather than on central office leadership. Additionally, distributed leadership has no mechanism for addressing how policies are implemented in school settings and how an explicit focus on learning focused leadership can be further developed. By incorporating these frameworks into the conceptual framework for this study, a unique framework was developed. This study sought to understand how an approach to leadership that involved distributed leadership, leadership for learning, and tenets of policy implementation theory worked in concert to assist the school superintendent as they lead effective implementation of the CCSS in their school district.

**Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what behaviors and activities does an effective superintendent engage when leading the implementation of the CCSS?

2. How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?

3. What challenges did the superintendent face when working to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?

**Conceptual Framework**

Three theoretical frameworks informed this work: policy implementation theory, distributed leadership, and leadership for learning. Policy implementation theory provides a construct by which the relationships among policies, policy actors, and policy implementation sites can be explored and their influence on implementation understood (Honig, 2006). Distributed leadership offers a supportive leadership paradigm whereby
school leaders can mobilize multiple actors within the school community to work in a synergistic, concertive fashion toward the implementation result (Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2008; Spillane, 2005, 2006). Leadership for learning provides direction; it accounts for superintendents’ steadfast focus on the core function of schooling—teaching and learning (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Combined, these theoretical frameworks offer a mediating conceptual framework for leadership of the CCSS whereby student learning focused implementation of the CCSS will be a reflection of all influencing factors, rather than the product of a blunt instrument made to fit the organization.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for leading implementation of the CCSS.
Overview of the Research Methodology

This study examined the leadership behavior of one school district superintendent as she worked to lead for the implementation of the CCSS. A single case study design was employed because case study methods are ideal when the goal is to provide a holistic description of a contemporary event (Yin, 2009). The participant was selected through a purposeful, chained-referral method. Members of the 25-member governing board of representatives of the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), Illinois Regional Office of Education (ROE) superintendents, and professional contacts of the researcher were contacted to solicit recommendations for study candidates.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the superintendent and focus group interviews were conducted with groups of administrators and CCSS implementing teachers/instructional coaches. Additionally, site observations were conducted and applicable documents reviewed. The data were coded and organized by relevant themes.

Limitations

Because is not possible to structure a perfect research study, it is a chief responsibility of the researcher to clearly articulate the limitations associated with the study they plan to conduct (Mertens, 2009). This study was limited in five ways: (a) generalizability, (b) sampling procedures, (c) self-reporting by study participants, (d) duration of the study, and (e) inability to connect a metric to assess the efficacy of studied district’s implementation of the CCSS.
First, because this study was structured in a case study format, generalizability to a larger sample of sites or participants cannot be claimed. Qualitative forms of research like case studies are, by nature, situated in a particular context (Creswell, 2009). Instead of connecting the results from case study sites to other particular school sites, the results and findings from this study should be interpreted in a manner that promotes an expanded understanding of the theoretical underpinnings that inform the conceptual framework for this study (Yin, 2009).

The chained-referral sampling procedures presented also may have caused potential study sites to be overlooked. Even though the IASA’s regional directors, ROE superintendents, and professional contacts of the researcher represent all potential study sites in Illinois, it is conceivable that one or more regional directors or superintendents do not have intimate knowledge of superintendents’ leadership practices. Thus, potential matches for the study may not have been nominated for the study.

Similarly, in selecting the study site and in collecting data, this study relied heavily on self-reports by the superintendent, administrators, teachers, and other adults closely involved with implementation of the CCSS in the selected study site. It is recognized that the information that participants provided may not reveal the entirety of a situation, nor may their perceptions of their work or others reflect the reality of implementation.

In addition, 9 hours of site observations, numerous documents, and 11 interviews were conducted and reviewed for this study over an 8-month period. The work to lead for implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District was an enormous task and this
study only captured a small portion of this work. Had more time been available to the researcher, it is possible additional information would have further enhanced the findings and implications associated with this study.

Finally, the establishment of the study site as a district where implementation of the CCSS was considered exemplary was reliant on subjective reports during the chained-referral sampling process. Because no metric to determine efficacy of CCSS implementation was established or in use across Illinois during the duration of the study, it was not possible to critique Ericsson School District’s work to implement the CCSS.

**Delimitations**

In addition to noting limitations associated with this study, it is important to recognize that several delimitations were imposed. Delimitations included: (a) school site location, (b) school site performance, and (c) length of superintendent tenure.

When seeking a site for this study, the pool of potential sites was restricted to the state of Illinois. In addition, school district site performance served as a delimiting factor. Because this study sought to investigate the practice of an effective superintendent, the selected school district study site must have demonstrated evidence of consistently meeting or exceeding, or have showed evidence of progress toward meeting or exceeding, standards on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and/or the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE). Also, the school superintendent charged with leading the district must have served the district for a minimum of three consecutive
years—in the role of superintendent—while positive performance on ISAT or PSAE was noted.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. First, and most importantly, this study developed understanding of strategic leadership behaviors that fostered effective implementation of the CCSS. Scholars have suggested that implementation of standards-based reforms such as the CCSS present significant leadership challenges for superintendents. This research—research directed toward a school district site where implementation unfolded in a positive fashion—helps to inform scholarly and practitioner-focused understandings of an effective CCSS implementation process.

More broadly, this work contributes to the empirical research literature in the area of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership has been described as a fashionable framework for educational leadership (Harris, 2006a), but empirical support for such an approach is still emerging. More scholarly work is needed to advance understanding of how leadership is distributed in schools (Spillane & Healey, 2010). Also, because distributed leadership needs to be coordinated or facilitated in some fashion throughout the organization (Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss, & Sacks, 2008), greater attention needs to be directed toward superintendents who evidence such a leadership style at the district level.

In addition, this study contributes to recent research in policy implementation. While a robust field that has covered many decades, contemporary approaches to policy
implementation research have focused heavily on the interdependence among policies, people, and places (Honig, 2006). Research in this vein continues to evolve and more focused attention to the role of superintendent leadership in the educational policy implementation process serves to expand on similar, recent research that examined central office leadership influence on the implementation process (Honig, 2003; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2005).

**Definition of Terms**

**Common Core State Standards.** A set of K-12 learning standards in the academic areas of English/Language Arts and mathematics. Currently, 43 states in the United States have adopted the standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

**Distributed leadership.** Distributed leadership offers a conceptualization of leadership that puts the unit of analysis in practice, rather than that of the individual (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Distributed leadership reaches beyond the heroics of individuals and recognizes that leadership practice is a product of the interaction among leaders, followers, and their situation (Spillane, 2006).

**Leadership for learning.** An educational leadership framework that suggests leadership be focused on the following key dimensions: (a) establishing a focus on learning, (b) building professional communities that value learning, (c) engaging external environments that matter for learning, (d) acting strategically and sharing leadership, and (e) creating coherence (Copland & Knapp, 2006, p. x).
**Policy implementation.** Educational policy implementation examines the negotiated interactions among policies, people, and places that combine to produce the implementation result (Honig, 2006).

**Summary**

This chapter has provided a broad overview of the research study. The research problem and purpose for the study were discussed and the research questions that guided the study were presented. The chapter also included an overview of the research methodology, presented the conceptual framework that was used to situate the study, and provided discussion of limitations, delimitations, the significance of the study, and a definition of terms.

Chapter Two focuses on a review of the extant literature related to the study. The chapter addresses the following five areas: (a) standards-based educational reform, (b) conceptualizations of the superintendency, (c) distributed leadership; (d) leadership for learning, and (e) policy implementation theory. The chapter culminates with a description of the conceptual framework for the study.

In Chapter Three, a detailed presentation of the research methodology is provided. The chapter details the following areas: (a) the research design; (b) population, site selection, and participants; (c) ethical considerations and validity; (d) data collection procedures; (e) data analysis procedures; and (f) a timeline of the study.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the findings from this study. Nine emergent themes that supported effective implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District
are put forward. These themes include: (a) all stakeholders learning together; (b) collaboration; (c) goal setting; (d) the superintendent as a learning leader; (e) the superintendent working to assess school system capacity; (f) the superintendent communicating/messaging with stakeholders; (g) the superintendent identifying and relieving stress in the school system; (h) the superintendent positioning staff correctly for implementation; and (i) the superintendent providing/coordinating professional development and instructional coaching.

Chapter Five focuses on interpretation of the research findings as related to the conceptual framework and literature review. Implications for further research and professional practice are discussed in detail.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter focuses on the superintendent and the need to cultivate a district-level distributed approach to leadership for learning that is responsive to the policy context within which school superintendents work. Using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as a focal policy for study of this leadership work, this review centers on seven areas. First, a historical chronology of the standards movement explores the development of educational standards, the purported benefits and critiques of the standards movement, and challenges to school leadership in the standards era. Second, the role of the school superintendent is defined with particular focus on the lead district administrator’s role with regard to management, politics, and instructional leadership. Next, two leadership frameworks—distributed leadership and leadership for learning—are explored as models for superintendent leadership in the 21st century. Then, policy implementation theory is reviewed from a developmental and conceptual lens to aid in developing an understanding of how context influences leadership in the standards-based era. Finally, a conceptual framework that pulls from distributed leadership, leadership for learning, and policy implementation is presented as a model for superintendent leadership for CCSS implementation.

History of the Standards Movement

From the early 1980s, the movement toward a national set of curricular standards has been in constant motion. Since the publication of A Nation at Risk (National
Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) support for a series of reforms in public education has been fostered by fears of the United States’ waning global economic competitiveness (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). *A Nation at Risk* accused public education of producing a “rising tide of mediocrity” (NCEE, 1983, p. 5) that threatened the future of the nation and its people. The primary cause of such mediocrity was alleged to be low academic standards in the nation’s elementary and secondary schools and, as a result, a great deal of enthusiasm was generated for a movement toward establishing curriculum standards (Porter, 1994).

The notion of curricular standards was not a new one. Porter (1994) reported that content standards and tightly aligned performance measurements reach back over 100 years in our nation. However, increased openness to greater centralization of the educational system paved the way for a wave of standards-based reforms predicated on the notion that being clear about what students should know and be able to do, enacting tests to measure what students know and can do, and holding educators accountable for outcomes would improve student achievement (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Porter, Polikoff, & Smithson, 2009).

Early efforts to establish national content standards involved the administration of President George H. W. Bush. The White House, acting in conjunction with the National Governors Association (NGA), “declared that by 2000, the nation would meet such goals as ensuring all children begin school ready to learn and American students are to be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement” (Kirst & Wirt, 2009, p. 22). Although the efforts of the George H. W. Bush administration fell short in establishing a
national curricular framework, this administration set the stage for the further expansion of state educational standards under the subsequent administrations of Presidents William Clinton and George W. Bush (Kirst & Wirt, 2009).

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, known colloquially as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), marked the creation of the most stringent set of standards and accountability measures in the United States to date. More rigorous state standards for curricula, high-stakes accountability tests, and federally backed sanctions for a failure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress on state-defined measures of academic progress have defined the last decade of public education in the United States (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Yell & Drasgow, 2005). President Barak Obama’s Race to the Top initiative recently moved the standards movement to new terrain with incentives to adopt the CCSS (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act [ARRA], 2009). The Common Core math and English language arts standards represent a shift from disparate content guidelines across states, to standards of consensus in grades K-12 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.; Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). Led by the NGA and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the CCSS give definition to the knowledge and skills students must master in grades K-12 for English language arts and mathematics (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). As of mid-2014, 43 states in the Union had signed on to implement the standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.).

The CCSS purport to be evidence based and informed by the educational practices of other top performing countries and the most successful standards of practice that were
previously developed by states (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Collectively, the CCSS are considered to be significantly more rigorous than past standards created by the individual states, and implementation is expected to require significant shifts in instructional practice in the nation’s schools (Kober & Rentner, 2012).

**Purported benefits of the standards movement.** In large part, the essence of the argument in favor of standards-based reform is contained within the major political documents found throughout the standards-reform era. For example, the need for educational standards was fervently advocated in *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983). President George W. Bush (2004) extolled the virtues of his signature NCLB legislation and articulated his “plan to raise educational standards for every child and to require accountability from every school” (p. 114). Most recently, President Barack Obama outlined his vision for education in his blueprint for reauthorization of ESEA. He argued, “we must raise expectations for our students, for our schools, and for ourselves” (United States Department of Education, 2010, p. 1).

Within this context, expectations to be raised are tightly coupled to the implementation of college- and career-ready standards (United States Department of Education, 2010). However, evidence for why standards-based reform is the solution to the shortcomings of the public education system referenced in these documents is decidedly absent. In fact, President George W. Bush (2004) most eloquently captured the leap from the statement of need for educational reform to the suggestion of standards-
based reforms: “When expectations are high, America’s children will rise to meet them” (p. 114).

Critiques of the standards movement. The absence of clear research-based evidence supporting standards-based reform is notable. Today’s calls for standards-based reform to address issues of global economic competitiveness and equity are oddly similar to calls from *A Nation at Risk*. From a layman’s perspective, to commit further on a mode of reform that has not yet addressed the key complaints advanced three decades ago appears to ensure that the status quo be maintained. This position, coupled with the reality that research support for standards-based reform and accountability is weak, contributes to the argument that the next iteration of standards reform is just another stop on an otherwise uneventful journey (Mathis, 2010).

This movement has been criticized by some scholars for focusing on the wrong standards of achievement and for forcing school districts to restrict students’ studies to a narrowed curriculum that focuses on breadth of coverage rather than depth and content mastery (Meier, 2010; Porter, 1994). Scholars also have argued that the standards-based reform movement is inherently inequitable: To mandate one set of standards of what students should know and be able to do is to ignore the role “culture, emotions, personal backgrounds, prior experiences, prior knowledge, and stages of cognitive and social development” play in the development of the student (Tienken, 2011, p. 61). Others have criticized the movement because it provides little to no evidence that its primary aim—an increase in the global competitiveness of the American student—has been or will be achieved through standards-based reform (Zhao, 2010).
Criticisms of the CCSS abound; there exist concerns that standardization diminishes the variety of experiences students receive to spur higher-order thinking (Mathis, 2010). A concern also has been voiced that the CCSS will be unaccompanied by capacity building efforts that will ensure teachers are prepared to implement the standards and avoid punitive consequences associated with failure to get students to meet the standards (Mathis, 2010). Professional critiques from such organizations as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Council of Teachers of English also have challenged the efficacy of the standards (Mathis, 2010).

**Challenges to school leadership in the standards era.** Despite these critiques, there is little indication the trend toward a greater focus on standards-based education will diminish in the future (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Mathis, 2010). With this reality recognized, there is need to understand the challenges—and by extension leadership opportunities—those charged with leading schools in this era must negotiate. Vogel (2010) suggested leaders be prepared to provide leadership in three areas: (a) the structure of school organizations may not be conducive to standards implementation, (b) standards-based reforms will require leaders to facilitate a great deal of change among teachers and students, and (c) implementation of standards-based reforms will require a focus on building knowledge, skills, and learning across the organization.

**Challenges associated with organizational structure in schools.** The organizational structure of public schools historically has been predicated on a system of loose coupling in which teachers have enjoyed great discretion in what gets implemented in the classroom (Weick, 1976). Vogel (2010) contends that the result of loose coupling
is an insulating effect on teachers’ practice in the classroom. Positively, this result may prevent classroom instruction from being negatively impacted by poor leadership. However, it also means the work of positive changes to teaching and learning in schools do not always take hold (Vogel, 2010). Swanson and Stevenson (2002) provide a more detailed description of this phenomenon:

teachers’ professional autonomy provides an additional buffer from efforts to change practices initiated by educational administrators at the district, state or other higher order system levels. As a result, the technical core of instruction is surprisingly resistant to external influences for change. (p. 2)

The loose coupling practices of public schools at the local level have been noted to be in conflict with the overarching themes of greater coordination and control featured in standards-based reforms (Fusarelli, 2002). In addition, the need for change has prompted new thinking about the need for tighter controls to spur efficiency, effectiveness, and change in schools (Meyer, 2002). In response to this thinking, scholars have noted that administrators have engaged in developing organizational practices that promote tighter coupling of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure curricula are implemented with fidelity. In their qualitative study of four K-8 schools in Chicago, Spillane, Parise, and Sherer (2010) found that school leaders enacted organizational routines such as coordinated reviews of standards-based assessment data to selectively couple classroom practice to the focus of governmental reforms. The importance of coupling practice also is echoed by Rorrer, Skrla, and Scheurich (2008). Having conducted an exhaustive review of literature pertaining to how district-level leaders spur reform, Rorrer et al. posited that introducing modes of tight coupling at the district level can help school districts achieve systemic reform. However, Rorrer et al. are careful to
suggest that a variable approach to coupling—one that includes both tight and loose controls—is critical to organizational progress. Overreliance on tight coupling “extinguishes the advantage of local adaptiveness” (Rorrer et al., p. 339).

Challenges associated with fostering change in schools. The need to shift schools from loosely coupled systems to systems that incorporate simultaneously loose and tight forms of control is not just one of changing organizational structures and routines, it is one of moving the people within the system. To understand how systems change, scholars highlight distinctions between first and second order change. In schools, first order change is focused on making small changes that are an extension of past practices, whereas second order change focuses on making a distinct break with the past (Waters & Marzano, 2006). For example, first order change may focus on making a small change to curriculum; in contrast, second order change may be focused on adjusting a longstanding institutional norm (Leithwood, Aitken, & Jantzi, 2001).

Fullan (2001) contends the change process involves a degree of “messiness” (p. 31). To foster change toward standards-based education is an example of this complex process and requires leadership. Specifically,

beliefs regarding data and professional interactions must change, and all the barriers associated with change must be addressed by those leading this change. Resistance to change can take many forms, from active opposition to passive nonparticipation, and be justified by a variety of rationales. (Vogel, 2010, p. 74)

These rationales may be born out in the ways that various stakeholders experience change. For example, Waters and Marzano (2006) argue that what may constitute a second order change for one teacher may present as a first order change for another. To
provide effective leadership, superintendents must estimate accurately the order of magnitude change presents for each of the involved stakeholders (Waters & Marzano).

Challenges associated with building knowledge, skills, and learning across the organization. Transition to standards-based reforms also requires leadership to work to build knowledge and skills across the organization (Vogel, 2010). Using data gathered from surveys of deputy state superintendents or their designees in 37 states and the District of Columbia, Kober and Rentner (2012) found that preparing teachers for the new CCSS was viewed as a major challenge. Demands associated with developing and providing sustained professional development for teachers dominated respondents’ thinking. Related concern focused on the need to develop educator evaluation systems to hold teachers and principals accountable for student performance in a CCSS-aligned system (Kober & Rentner).

In addition to providing new training and professional development to teachers for CCSS implementation, leadership must encourage staff to feel safe taking risks and engage with teachers in constant reflective dialogue (Vogel, 2010). To facilitate such support requires that school leaders “have a clear understanding of what a standards led system looks like in a classroom so that they can assist teachers with making the necessary instructional changes that are required” (Vogel, 2010, p. 127). This need can be particularly difficult for school leaders to meet as they are required to develop the necessary knowledge and skills in a shorter timeframe than teachers. Additionally, school leaders must be prepared to support staff in implementing standards-based reforms in multiple content areas.
These leadership challenges associated with transitioning schools to systems ready to implement standards-based reforms are significant. In response, the role of the school superintendent has experienced a historical shift toward a greater focus on providing leadership in these areas (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Fessler, 2011; Kowalski, 2006; Murphy, 2003).

Varying Conceptualizations of the Superintendency

As the standards movement has progressed and evolved, so too has the position of the school superintendent. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) suggest, “The superintendency is so very different from district to district that making generalizations is hazardous. In fact, there is no such thing as the superintendency; instead, there are many superintendencies. Often they are more unlike than like each other” (p. 15). The assertion by Glass et al. (2000) is apt; scholars have noted that contextual variables have implications for what it means to be successful in a school leadership position (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson, 2011). Factors such as enrollment, geographic location, grade levels of schools, district size, organizational culture, fiscal situation, and political climate may all play a role in determining how school leaders structure their work (Bredeson et al., 2011; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Although each superintendency may place differing demands on the individual who occupies the position, superintendents experience similar responsibilities regardless of the location of the district they serve. In their study of contextual variables influencing superintendent practice, Bredeson et al. (2011) investigated the leadership practices of
school district superintendents in Sweden and the mid-western United States. Even among a sample of superintendents from different countries, they found that respondents indicated there were more similarities than differences regarding their work responsibilities.

The similarities noted by Bredeson et al. (2011) also are borne out in thematic roles that have emerged for school superintendents in the literature. Kowalski’s (2006) review of the responsibilities of the superintendency prompted his categorizing the role into five general conceptualizations: the superintendent as applied social scientist, communicator, organizational manager, democratic statesman, and teacher-scholar. These descriptions are not static: As public education has evolved, so too have the role conceptualizations for the superintendent. At times, one or more of these roles has achieved prominence over others. Today, manager, democratic statesman, and teacher-scholar—terms Cuban (1998) labeled as managerial, political, and instructional—are at the forefront of contemporary superintendents’ practice (Bredeson & Kose, 2007; Fessler, 2011; Kowalski; Murphy, 2003).

The superintendent as organizational manager. Prior to the 20th century, the superintendent was thought of as a scholarly figure who had a great deal to do with instructional programming in schools (Cuban, 1998; Kowalski, 2006). While that role has carried through to the present day, it was significantly marginalized in the early 1900s. The prominence of classical theory, such as Taylor’s (1916) scientific principles of management, pressed school superintendents to redefine their organizations and their leadership practices. Classical theory hallmarks that involve defining work in terms of
systematic processes and division of labor became commonplace (Kowalski, 2006; Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2005; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Management tasks dominated superintendents’ work as they focused increasingly on applying principles of classical theory to budgeting, facilities operation, and personnel management (Callahan, 1962; Kowalski, 2006).

Following the stock market crash of 1929, the inclination toward classical management theories faded. As these principles lost their favor, organizational theorists including Maslow (1943) and McGregor (1957) shifted the focus from rigidly structured systems that managed workers in a factory-like manner, to systems that sought to promote individuals’ self-direction so that employees could work not only toward the organization’s goals but also toward their own goals for self-actualization.

As thinking about organizations and management evolved, scholars refined old concepts and also introduced new conceptual understandings of how organizations were managed best. Seminal works have promoted thinking about the importance of organizational structure (Mintzberg, 1979), culture in the workplace (Schein, 1993), and systems-oriented feedback loops that promote constant learning in an organization (Senge, 1990). Throughout these evolutions, the focus on the need for school superintendents to remain sound managers has been rarely questioned (Kowalski, 2006). However, while contemporary approaches to management in public education have continued to stress the importance of smooth and efficient budgeting and operations, traditional notions of personnel management have given way to discussion of personnel in the context of leadership (Cuban, 1998; Kowalski, 2006).
Scholarly literature and practitioner-focused publications targeted toward school superintendents are rife with discussion of leadership (Green, 2009; Guthrie & Schuermann, 2010; Rosberg, McGee, & Burgett, 2006). The reality for today’s superintendents “is not choosing between leadership and management, it is establishing equilibrium between these two essential roles” (Kowalski, 2006, p. 42). As a greater focus on leading personnel toward organizational goals has emerged, so too has the need to astutely manage the political realities of negotiating compromise.

**The superintendent as political leader.** A focus on political leadership for the school superintendent first gained prominence as schools sought to compete for scarce resources during The Great Depression. The superintendent emerged as a figure who would lobby on behalf of the school district to secure limited state funding from other competing governmental entities (Kowalski, 2006). However, the focus on competing for funds, while still a critical role, was soon only one part of a much more expanded political role.

The superintendency operates at a nexus of conflict. Incompatible goals and divergent interests expressed by boards of education, policymakers, teacher unions, and parent groups all contribute to situate the superintendency in perpetual turbulence (Crowson, 1987; Cuban, 1998; Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Lashway, 2002). Compounding these challenges is the reality that as the educational reform movement has trended toward greater centralization, superintendents have found themselves facing these same political dilemmas with less power, having lost control to state and federal legislators (Kirst & Wirt, 2009).
In the political domain, superintendents carry out their work by structuring negotiations and other coalition building efforts with a variety of stakeholders (Cuban, 1998). The majority of their time is spent engaging in conversation with numerous individuals as they seek to build political consensus (Kirst & Wirst, 2009; Kowalski, 2006). However, political leadership should act as a means to an end. Instruction should operate at the apex of the school district’s agenda and superintendent leadership in the political domain should act to support an “overriding goal of continuous instructional improvement” (Lashway, 2002, p. 5).

**The superintendent as instructional leader.** In its infancy, the superintendency primarily was concerned with teaching and learning practices within the school system (Kowalski, 2006; Peterson, 1996). This role conceptualization has remained important for school superintendents over many decades, but the focus on management efficiency in the early 1900s and political maneuvering in the mid 20th century somewhat marginalized the instructional role of school superintendents (Kowalski).

In recent decades, educational reform movements and efforts to restructure schools have reintroduced the importance of the instructional leadership function for school superintendents (Murphy, 1994). Responding to pressures associated with academic standards-based reforms, the superintendency once again has begun to lean more heavily on the instructional leadership role conceptualization to create communities of professional practice that maintain a focus on student learning (Lashway, 2002). How superintendents structure their leadership practice in response to the demands associated with the accountability movement is less clear. Still, Bredeson and Kose (2007) argued
that “whether one is speaking of direct, indirect, distributed, or other ways of asserting instructional leadership, increased attention and responsibility in superintendent instructional leadership is a desirable response to educational reform and accountability” (p. 2).

In their meta-analysis of 27 quantitative studies representative of 2,817 school districts, Waters and Marzano (2006) begin to address this dearth of knowledge on superintendent leadership behaviors that support student learning. They concluded that an instructional leadership focus by superintendents correlates positively with improved student achievement and suggested that effective leadership behaviors in this vein include: (a) engaging in collaborative goal-setting with all stakeholders, (b) ensuring that the goal-setting process results in non-negotiable targets for student achievement, and (c) continuous monitoring of student progress toward achievement goals (Waters & Marzano).

While the scholarly work by Waters and Marzano begins to inform effective superintendent instructional leadership practice, relatively little other empirical research has been directed toward superintendent leadership for student learning in response to educational reform and accountability (Bredeson & Kose, 2007). In addition, there has been an insufficient focus on research that examines the leadership behaviors of school superintendents within the various contexts within which they work (Bredeson et al., 2011). Bredeson et al. (2011) suggest “even less research has focused on the manner in which superintendents work to recognize, understand and shape the contextual influences found within their school districts” (p. 3).
Fortunately, several promising theoretical frameworks for thinking about school leadership have emerged in recent years and a growing body of research has developed to support these frameworks. In addition, thinking about how policies similar to the CCSS get implemented has evolved to a point in which a focus on the contextual factors influencing implementation is paramount. Here, distributed leadership, leadership for learning, and policy implementation are examined from a conceptual perspective and recent empirical research works are noted.

**Distributed Leadership**

The educational leadership literature is rife with examples of distributed leadership practices. Unfortunately, this discussion is muddled by scholarship that uses the same terminology—distributed leadership—to describe a variety of approaches to leadership in schools (Harris, 2006a). Descriptions of shared, collaborative, democratic, team, and participative forms of leadership all weave in and out of the distributed leadership literature (Harris, 2006a; Spillane, 2005). These conceptualizations of leadership can both complement and contradict one another, and the confusion that surrounds the differing descriptions of distributed leadership often lead scholars to talking past one another and arriving at false notions of consensus (Harris, 2006a; Mayrowetz, 2008; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Moreover, discussion of the varied perspectives of distributed leadership range from theoretical to pragmatic, and the empirical support for such conceptualizations is embryonic and often divergent (Lashway, 2003; Mayrowetz, 2008).
Fortunately, as scholarship on this topic has advanced, common thematic elements have begun to emerge to define a distributed approach to leadership. Future scholarship needs to take stock of the varying conceptualizations of distributed leadership, explore the empirical anchors to such conceptualizations, and extend research and study operations to help develop a more complete understanding of how leadership is distributed within schools (Spillane & Healey, 2010). Such scholarship should help advance augmented conceptualizations of distributed leadership and contribute to evaluations of such conceptualizations (Youngs, 2009). To that end, this section explores the conceptual and theoretical roots of distributed leadership, details the empirical works that have emerged in response to such conceptualizations of distributed leadership, critiques the empirical research on this topic, provides a description of the tenets of distributed leadership as they have emerged with support in the empirical literature, and suggests a definition of distributed leadership for this study.

**Conceptual and theoretical roots of distributed leadership.** Distributed leadership is not a new concept (Harris, 2005; Youngs, 2009). Gronn (2008) indicated that more than 60 years ago the notion of distributing leadership began to take shape with the assistance of several scholars. Benne and Sheats (1948) spoke of diffusion of leadership and emphasized the importance of shared responsibility, Gibb (1958) challenged the notion that leadership was the duty of a single individual, French and Snyder (1959) envisioned leadership being distributed among members of a group, Katz and Kahn (1978) recognized the need to share the leadership function, and Schein (1988) connected effectiveness with optimal distribution. Although these early scholars
discussed the notion of distributing leadership, they stopped short of exploring their ideas empirically (Gronn, 2008). It was not until the late 1990s that, in response to an overabundance of scholarship that emphasized the merits of heroic individualism with regard to school leadership, the concept of distributing leadership reemerged (Gronn, 2000, 2008; Lashway, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006, 2009; Spillane & Hunt, 2010).

At the beginning of the 21st century, working separately, Gronn (2000) and Spillane (2005) presented their theoretical cases for a distributed approach to leadership in schools. Although their descriptions vary, common ground exists and both have argued “that their theorizing should be used as a means to better understand leadership practice, rather than prescribe distribution of leadership work” (Youngs, 2009, p. 379).

The leader-plus and practice aspects. Spillane’s conceptualization of distributed leadership is informed by distributed cognition and activity theory (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Distributed cognition refers to the understanding that an individual’s thoughts cannot be simply understood as a function of individual agency but instead must recognize the interdependence that occurs between the individual, others, and their environment (Nardi, 1996; Spillane et al., 2001). In activity theory, context is again emphasized. However, activity theory purports that an activity does not occur within a prescribed context but instead the “activity itself is the context” (Nardi, 1996, p. 76).

The interdependence that is foundational to distributed cognition and activity theory informs the two components that are central to Spillane’s conceptualization of distributed leadership: the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect (Spillane, 2006;
Spillane et al., 2001). Important to the leader-plus aspect is recognition that leadership does not only reside in the offices of those occupying formal leadership positions in school districts (Spillane, 2006). The leader-plus aspect argues that leadership is the product of the cumulative efforts of many individuals who exert leadership throughout the organization. Conceptualized in this fashion, leadership not only encompasses those exerting influence through formal positions like that of the superintendent and principal but also includes leadership from traditionally informal sources such as teachers and curriculum specialists—individuals who do not hold formal administrative appointments within the school system (Spillane, 2006).

The leader-plus aspect, while important, is insufficient without consideration of the practice aspect. The practice aspect references the interactions that occur between leaders, followers, and their situation (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). In this view, and once again connecting to activity theory, leadership activity is “distributed in the interactive web of actors, artifacts, and situation (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 20). In this regard, leadership is “stretched” (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 25) across this web. This notion contrasts starkly with previous top-down conceptions of leadership.

**Numerical action, concertive action, and conjoint agency.** Like Spillane, Gronn (2000) set out on a journey to redefine thinking about leadership. Gronn (2002) problematized the traditional leader-follower relationship, insisting that the existing leadership-followership orthodoxy prescribed practice rather than described it. Similarly influenced by activity theory, Gronn (2000) conflated leadership with influence and
suggested that a distributed approach to understanding leadership provided a “helpful and useful bridge between organizational structures and the actions of agents” (p. 334).

Gronn (2002) conceptualized distributed leadership in two main categories: numerical action and concertive action. Numerical action emerged in response to descriptions of focused leadership. According to Gronn,

if focused leadership means that only one individual is attributed with the status of leader, an additive or numerical view of distributed leadership means the aggregated leadership of an organization is dispersed among some, many, or maybe all of the members. (p. 429)

Numerical action does not assign more importance to leaders serving in formal positions over those serving in informal positions, but instead leadership is merely the “sum of its parts (i.e., the sum of the attributed influence)” (Gronn, p. 429).

Concertive action is similar in that leadership is conceptualized as a conflagration of all individual inputs, but it differs in that it suggests leadership may be more than just the sum of its parts. Instead, concertive action implies coordinated leadership acts rather than individual actions (Gronn, 2002). Concertive leadership action can occur in three ways: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices (Gronn, 2002). Spontaneous collaboration refers to situations in which groups of individuals with varying skill sets pool their collective expertise around a problem and achieve “brief bursts of synergy which may be the extent of the engagement or the trigger for ongoing collaboration” (Gronn, 2002, p. 430). Intuitive working relations advance the notion of spontaneous collaboration and build on organizational membership and close working relationships. In such instances, individuals form work units that rely heavily on one another “and the partners are aware of themselves as co-leaders” (Gronn, 2002,
Finally, the third concertive form of distributed leadership—institutionalized practices—refers to formal organizational structures put into place to foster collaborative leadership behavior. Such arrangements often include leadership teams and task forces (Gronn, 2002).

These three modes of concertive leadership represent successive stages toward conjoint agency (Gronn, 2002). Conjoint agency stresses the importance of interdependence among individuals working together and represents a strengthening of the “coincidence of effort, goals, and resources in the pursuit of mutually agreed ends” (Gronn, 2002, pp. 431-432).

**Other conceptualizations of distributed leadership.** While the work of Gronn (2000, 2002, 2008) and Spillane (2005, 2006) forms the majority of the contemporary theoretical underpinnings of distributed leadership in the literature, other scholars have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of this practice. Fullan (2001) argued that effective organizational change is predicated on a delicate balance between professional relationships within the organization and collective knowledge building and sharing. Silins, Mulford, and Zarins (2002) spoke of distributed leadership as a relational concept “exerted through social interactions” (p. 622), and Wallace (2002) argued that in schools, “principals are key, but not exclusive, leaders and managers” (p. 167). These conceptualizations and others contribute to Gronn’s (2000, 2002, 2008) and Spillane’s (2005, 2006) assertions that distributed leadership involves cultivating interdependence and developing leadership capacity across the actors working in an educational system.
**Empirical works defining distributed leadership in practice.** The theoretical definitions of distributed leadership have been regarded as quite useful for thinking about leadership in schools, and the popularization of the term has led to “a high level of theoretical and practical uptake” (Gronn, 2008, p. 141). However, when considering application of distributed leadership thinking to leadership for standards-based reforms, this enthusiasm must be tempered with the recognition that few empirical studies have focused on application of distributed leadership principles at the district level.

Additionally, the empirical studies conducted thus far have not employed a unified definition of the term. Some studies develop a conceptualization of distributed leadership built on a foundation of the leader-plus, practice, and conjoint agency concepts, while others hardly define the term at all (Law, Galton, & Wan, 2010; Spillane, Camburn, & Pareja, 2007).

Mayrowetz (2008) noted that while nearly all researchers cite work conducted by Gronn (2000, 2002, 2008) and Spillane (2005, 2006) as having informed their thinking on distributed leadership, few actually utilize a conceptualization of distributed leadership that is grounded in the descriptive orientation of Gronn and Spillane’s work. Instead, scholars have merged the thinking of Gronn and Spillane with other conceptualizations from the field of educational leadership. Mayrowetz’s inventory of the literature on distributed leadership led him to conclude that four usages of the term *distributed leadership* have evolved: (a) distributed leadership as a theoretical lens for studying the activity of leadership, (b) distributed leadership as a lever for democracy, (c) distributed
leadership to promote efficiency and effectiveness, and (d) distributed leadership as a mechanism for human capacity building within the organization.

Reviewing the empirical research that had been conducted thus far, Youngs (2009) indicated the studies on distributed leadership can be categorized in two ways: descriptive studies and normative studies. Descriptive studies focus on providing a narrative of distributed leadership practice in educational settings, while normative studies seek to identify linkages between distributed leadership and modes of increased organizational performance (Harris, 2006a; Youngs).

Mayrowetz (2008) argued that future studies utilizing distributed leadership should clearly define what is meant by the term and make a strong connection to how the “research will inform efforts at school improvement and leadership development” (p. 432). Here, empirical studies in the descriptive and normative veins are reviewed, and a unified conceptualization of the term is presented.

**Descriptive studies.** A number of studies have emerged that give credence to the leader-plus, practice, and conjoint agency components of distributed leadership. Spillane et al. (2007) set out to explore the leader-plus and practice aspects of distributed leadership by focusing their research lens on the school principal. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study collected data on the professional experiences of 52 school principals serving elementary, middle, high, and special schools in a mid-sized urban school district. Principals were paged at random intervals throughout the day and were directed to report whether they were engaged in administrative, curriculum and instruction, professional growth, or relationship fostering activities. The principals also
reported whether they were leading or co-leading the activities in which they were engaged and, if co-leading, the individual with whom they were co-leading. Results indicated that co-leadership between the principal and others in the schools studied was quite commonplace. Spillane et al. concluded that the results are supportive of distributed leadership theoretical propositions that posit the work of leadership is spread across multiple actors.

Similarly, Park and Datnow (2009) found that a distributed approach to leadership and decision making was present in effective school data teams. Using multiple-case study methodology, purposeful sampling was used to select four urban school systems. Two selected school districts were mid-sized public school districts with long histories of service to the community and the other two systems were relatively new charter management organizations. The researchers found that student achievement data was made relevant to instruction by distributing “decision-making authority in a manner that empowered different staff members to utilize their expertise (Park & Datnow, p. 477). However, unlike Spillane et al. (2007), Park and Datnow found that, although these practices were shared among administrators and staff, the school systems centralized some authority for some decision-making areas while decentralizing still others.

Spillane, Healey, and Parise (2009) found that a similar distributed perspective to leadership existed with regard to school administrators’ and other school leaders’ opportunities to develop professionally. Spillane et al. build from an emerging literature base that connects professional development to improved student achievement. Using principal and staff questionnaires, the researchers investigated formal and informal
opportunities for school administrators and teacher leaders to engage in professional development at 44 elementary, middle, and high schools in a mid-sized urban school district in the southeastern United States. They concluded that specific research attention to professional development opportunities for leadership should not be relegated to the school principal but instead should be focused on those in leadership positions across the organization—targeting those in administrative roles and teacher leadership roles.

Spillane and Hunt (2010) also found evidence of distributed leadership in the practice of school principals. Using data collected on 38 principals in a mid-size urban school district in the southeastern United States, Spillane and Hunt used a mixed-methods approach and found that a group of elementary, middle, and high school principals defied the traditional notion of school principals as “lone rangers” (p. 303). This group, termed “people-centered practitioners” (Spillane & Hunt, p. 305), spent half of their time co-leading activities with students, parents, and teachers.

Leithwood et al. (2007) investigated distributed leadership practices from a district-level perspective. Using a qualitative approach, the researchers focused on four elementary schools and four secondary schools in the context of a large urban/suburban school district in southern Ontario, conducting interviews with district administrators, building administrators, school leaders who were not in formal administrative positions, and teachers. Their findings indicated that formal district and school leaders were critical in fostering productive patterns of distributed leadership.

Normative studies. While useful for developing conceptual ideas and enthusiasm for a distributed approach to leadership, descriptive studies do little to advance the
argument for fostering distributed forms of leadership in school settings because the studies are divorced from connections to student achievement or school improvement. In response, a small number of scholars have begun to conduct normative studies that seek to “establish causal links between a greater degree of leadership distribution and improved student outcomes” (Youngs, 2009, p. 380). The picture painted by such studies remains unclear and warrants further investigation.

Utilizing a quantitative approach, Hallinger and Heck (2010) investigated the connection between distributed leadership and changes in school improvement capacity and student growth in learning over time. To begin, they randomly selected a longitudinal cohort of 13,391 third-grade students within 197 elementary schools in a western state in the United States. Using survey data from teachers supporting these students, Hallinger and Heck found significant, indirect effects of distributed leadership practice on student learning in mathematics and reading and noted that the evidence “suggests that change in distributed leadership can be empirically linked to change in school improvement capacity and subsequent growth in student learning” (p. 881).

Firestone and Martinez (2007) focused their research on examining how distributed leadership practices from the district office influenced teaching practice in the classroom. Using case study methodology, the researchers studied teachers and administrators engaged in math and science reform at four schools containing grades PreK-8. All schools were designated to receive special state aid to equalize funding with wealthier districts in the state. Two schools belonged to the same district, while two others represented different school districts. Using data collected from interviews, site
observations, and document review, the researchers concluded that district leaders and teacher leaders can work in concert to procure materials, monitor improvement, and professionally develop people. Deliberate efforts by administrators to support teacher leaders were found to have contributed to the overall ability of the district to influence teaching practice in the classroom.

Other studies have found a more tenuous relationship between distributed leadership and school outcomes. Using quantitative methods to examine the relationship between school-level factors like the presence of distributed leadership and school outcome measures, Silins et al. (2002) studied 96 secondary schools in Australia. They found no significant relationship between distributed leadership and their two school outcome variables: student engagement and student participation. The researchers posited that this undesirable outcome was attributable to the possibility that “distributed leadership within the current schools’ structures and systems may affect teachers as an additional burden, which may stretch teachers to their limits” (Silins et al., p. 638).

Hulpia, Devos, and Van Keer (2011) also completed empirical work that sought to connect distributed leadership to school outcomes. Using survey data from 1,522 teachers from 46 large secondary schools in Belgium, hierarchical linear modeling techniques were used to analyze components of distributed leadership in relation to teachers’ organizational commitment. The results indicated a relationship between the quality of support provided by formal leadership and the organizational commitment of teachers, but the influence of those serving in informal leadership roles was negligible (Hulpia et al.).
Analysis, critique, and model. Although the literature related to distributed leadership continues to present a disjointed narrative, and while the existing empirical scholarship provides an incomplete landscape of support for utilizing such a framework for leadership in practice, distributed leadership remains a fashionable approach to thinking about leadership in schools (Harris, 2006b). As Harris (2006a) points out, “In the international race to raise achievement and to improve standards we urgently need new ways of thinking about leadership and leadership practice in our schools. Distributed leadership offers us a place to start” (p. 184).

It also is important to recognize the limitations of current work. In speaking to existing scholarship, the quantity of empirical research remains small and the lens of the extant literature is narrow. The research is divorced from significant policy or instructional premises (Youngs, 2009) and with rare exception scholarship is situated at the school level. Additionally, distributed leadership has received significant critique for not having a mechanism to address formal authority and power relations (Youngs, 2009). Power is tightly coupled to politics in distributed leadership because the multiple sources of authority associated with this practice “make distributed leadership inherently political” (Youngs, 2009, p. 386). Put another way, whoever wields the most power in an educational system can shape the pattern of distributed leadership within the school system. When this thinking is extended to positional authority, the need to investigate the superintendent’s role in distributing leadership emerges. This need also extends to the assertion by Mascall, Leithwood, Strauss, and Sacks (2008) that distributed leadership needs to be coordinated or facilitated in some fashion.
Additional scholarly work is needed to advance understanding of how leadership is distributed in schools (Spillane & Healey, 2010). This study seeks to advance such scholarship and specifically seeks to investigate distributed leadership practices from a district-level perspective. In situating this scholarship, this work ascribes to a definition of distributed leadership that utilizes a unified theoretical conceptualization aligned with work by Spillane (2005, 2006) and Gronn (2000, 2002, 2008). In such a conceptualization, distributed leadership involves multiple actors working in a synergistic, concertive fashion stretched across all actors within the system.

**Leadership for Learning**

Distributed leadership offers a promising framework through which district-level school leadership may be conceptualized, but the lack of focus on instruction—and by extension student learning—is limiting (Youngs, 2009). To augment this weakness, the conceptual framework developed for this study partners distributed leadership with leadership for learning.

Much like distributed leadership literature is clouded by a variety of identifying terms, so too is leadership for learning. Leadership that focuses on the core technology of schooling—teaching and learning—has been described interchangeably as leadership for learning, instructionally focused leadership, and leadership for school improvement (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Despite the different labels, what is similar for each conceptualization is that educational leadership in this vein works to keep all
efforts of the school organization focused on improved student learning outcomes (Murphy et al.).

Operating in this field, numerous scholars have worked to define components that contribute to the development of the leadership for learning framework (see Knapp, Copland, Plecki, Portin, & colleagues, 2006; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010; Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Resnick & Glennan, 2002). This review focuses on three specific criteria associated with leadership for learning advanced by Copland and Knapp (2006) and reinforces such criteria with scholarship from other researchers that contribute to a more evolved understanding of the leadership for learning framework.

Building from decades of empirical research, Copland and Knapp (2006) suggested leadership for learning be focused on several key dimensions: (a) establishing a focus on learning, (b) building professional communities that value learning, (c) engaging external environments that matter for learning, (d) acting strategically and sharing leadership, and (e) creating coherence (p. x). Copland and Knapp argued that the leadership for learning framework be conceptualized in three ways: (a) as a mental map for school a district leaders working to foster improved educational outcomes for students in their school communities, (b) as a lens for examining existing school and school district leadership practices, and (c) as a guide for planning leadership preparation programming. When considering leadership for implementation of standards-based reforms, a conceptualization of leadership for learning that functions as a map for school district leadership emerges as most critical. Acting in concert with tenets of distributed leadership, leadership from the superintendent that establishes a strong focus on student
learning, builds a professional community that values learning, and works to create coherence is positioned to contribute significantly to effective CCSS implementation.

Establishing a focus on learning. The leadership for learning framework has asserted that the development and communication of a consistent, public focus on learning and teaching is critical to fostering improved learning outcomes for students (Copland & Knapp, 2006). Central to leadership efforts to foster such a focus include the willingness and ability of school leaders to develop within staff and members of the school community the internalized message that the learning of each child matters (Knapp et al., 2010).

From the perspective of district leadership like the superintendent, Copland and Knapp (2006) suggest several leadership strategies that district leaders may employ to foster a learning focused leadership platform that results in improved student learning. Copland and Knapp assert that leadership must situate itself at the site of learning—the classroom. Effective school superintendents are in their district’s school buildings often, and they interact with school administrators, teachers, and students regularly. In addition, and specifically connected to the effective implementation of standards-based reforms, Copland and Knapp advocate that district leaders for learning participate in the development and implementation of curricular frameworks that are aligned to learning standards. The work to develop curricular frameworks based on published standards should occur within the district, and student-learning successes that result from this work should be communicated to the larger school community.
Building a professional community that values learning. District leaders who ascribe to a learning-focused framework for leadership also direct efforts toward building and sustaining professional communities that value learning (Copland & Knapp, 2006). Professional communities for learning may include district administrators, building administrators, teachers, instructional coaches, and others working collaboratively in networks in and among district schools toward instructional improvement (Copland & Knapp; Knapp et al., 2010).

Effective learning-focused superintendents mobilize these professional communities to focus district efforts on strengthening professional development (Copland & Knapp, 2006). This work involves fostering the reorganization and reculturing of central office units to support the work of principals, teachers, and others in district schools (Knapp et al., 2010). Such a supportive leadership paradigm has been noted to be an essential ingredient for supporting district changes associated with standards-based reform (Vogel, 2010).

Creating coherence. The leadership for learning framework also heavily emphasizes the importance of district leaders acting to foster coherence across the organization (Copland & Knapp, 2006). In the context of a school district, coherence may be defined in three distinct ways: (a) as the existence of an alignment between activities and the resources needed to complete them, (b) as a connection between leadership efforts and the vision for learning that is understood and carried out by teachers, and (c) as a working consensus among teachers from class-to-class and grade-to-grade (Copland & Knapp).
Superintendents who effectively foster coherence-making restructure central office leadership roles to support curriculum and instruction efforts, and they create new avenues for effective communication between the central office and leaders within schools (Copland & Knapp, 2006). Central office support, and improved communication between the central office and schools, can help to build consensus for improvement efforts (Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003).

While establishing coherence within a school district will be helpful to efforts to implement standards-based reforms like the CCSS, efforts to create coherence must extend to the community within which implementation will occur. Additionally, implementation of the CCSS will require that coherence extend to the demands placed on the school and community by the CCSS policy itself. To advance understanding of how school superintendents may conceptualize leadership to address this challenge, policy implementation theory is explored.

**Policy Implementation**

To this point, it has been established that leadership is a critical component to any school district’s efforts to address challenges associated with implementation of standards-based reforms. Chiefly, leadership is needed to foster structural change across the organization as well as to ensure appropriate knowledge building practices are developed throughout the organization (Vogel, 2010). Distributed leadership and leadership for learning offer promising frameworks through which study of district leaders’ practice may be oriented as they structure their work to help school districts
accomplish standards-based reform. However, these frameworks may be strengthened by specific attention to thinking about how standards-based reform policies like the CCSS actually get implemented in school communities. Kingdon (2003) provided a definition of public policymaking:

Public policymaking includes a set of processes that, at a minimum, include (1) the setting of the agenda; (2) the specification of alternatives from which a choice is to be made; (3) an authoritative choice among those specified alternatives, as in a legislative vote or a presidential decision; and (4) the implementation of the decision. (pp. 2-3)

At face value, Kingdon’s definition of public policymaking suggests that implementation is the last step toward the realization of a policy that should solve a real or perceived problem. However, researchers since the early 1960s have found that implementation has unique challenges and the attitudes of the implementers and the conditions in which implementation occurs often can reshape policy (Odden, 1991; Honig, 2006). As Elmore (1979-80) explained, “analysis of policy choices matters very little if the mechanism for implementing those choices is poorly understood” (p. 605).

To assist in developing the final piece of the conceptual framework for this study, policy implementation is investigated from a developmental perspective. Contemporary models for thinking about how policies get implemented are explored and a review of recent empirical works that investigate the connection between school district central office leadership and policy implementation in school sites is provided.

**Policy implementation history.** In the United States, it has been argued that public education is an essential mechanism to ensuring the economic and social mobility of the American people (Alexander, 2008). Because of this importance, public education
has been situated at the center of numerous policy debates that seek to improve the quality and efficiency of public schools (Kirst & Wirt, 2009). The focus of these policy debates—and by extension policymaking efforts—has changed over time. An emphasis on local control in the early 1900s encouraged policymaking that positioned decision-making authority close to local legislators. This emphasis on local control was gradually replaced by the increasingly centralized forms of state and federal controls found in the policies of recent decades (Kirst & Wirt, 2009).

With increased centralization has come increased scrutiny because public education is now considered a “high-stakes, big-budget policy arena” (Honig, 2006, p. 1). Responding to such scrutiny, scholars have directed their attention to research that seeks to understand what occurs as policies are implemented. Building on work by Odden (1991), Honig contended that policy implementation research can be thought to conform to four distinct phases: (a) research that focuses on what gets implemented; (b) research that focuses on what gets implemented over time; (c) research that focuses on what works; and (d) contemporary approaches to implementation research that focus on the goals, tools, and targets of policy making. The narrative structured by these historical milestones informs contemporary approaches to understanding and results in theoretical propositions about how policies get implemented in educational settings today.

**Policy implementation research wave one: A focus on what gets implemented.**

Early policy implementation research in the initial wave primarily was focused on the narrow, distributive or redistributive state and federal policies of the 1960s and early 1970s (Honig, 2006). Prescriptive policies were common in this era and researchers
focused on whether or not implementers carried out the directives handed down by policymakers (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988; Honig; Sabartier & Mazmanian, 1979). Studies were nearly unanimous in their findings of implementation failure, and researchers concluded that policymakers should reduce implementation ambiguity by defining even more prescriptive procedures for implementation that included stronger incentives for policy implementation with fidelity (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1979; Honig).

As programming from the Great Society period—a time defined by a domestic policy focus that sought to eradicate poverty and promote racial equality (Honig, 2006; Hlebowitsh, 2001)—became commonplace in schools and other governmental agencies, the focus of implementation research began to take a more longitudinal approach. Research continued to focus on fidelity of implementation; however, researchers became increasingly aware that short-term change in practices due to policy mandates was small and that significant change occurred over a period of several years (Honig, 2006; Kirst & Jung, 1980).

**Policy implementation research wave two: A focus on what gets implemented over time.** The second wave of policy implementation acknowledged that time was a critical component to implementation success (Honig, 2006). For example, in their 13-year study of the implementation of Title 1 of ESEA, Kirst and Jung (1980) found that given a longer period of time, what was actually implemented in schools began to more closely mirror what was defined in the original policy. Kirst and Jung made an important contribution to the understanding of how policies are implemented when they suggested that the incremental change that occurred over time was, in part, a function of the agency
of the constituencies participating in implementation. Other researchers in this era also acknowledged that context of implementation was an important determinant of implementation success (Honig, 2006). In short, implementation was still recognized to be the product of the mandates and funds associated with policies, but thinking had evolved to also consider the influence that the values and beliefs of the community and people who were charged with implementation brought to bear on the implementation process.

Although variations among policies, people, and places were recognized as important to policy implementation, little empirical research was completed to identify how and to what extent each of these elements mattered (Honig, 2006). Instead, researchers remained focused on top-down conceptualizations as to how policies should be implemented and researchers’ work focused on how policy designs could be altered to mitigate the contextual factors that were associated with people and places (Honig, 2006).

**Policy implementation research wave three: A focus on what works.** The birth of the standards movement in the 1980s ushered in a new era of implementation research. A Nation at Risk (NCEE, 1983) touched off a series of reforms that were more systemic in nature than was the case in previous decades, and the associated focus of accountability began to shift implementation researchers focus more firmly toward the influence of people and places (Honig, 2006). For example, Rozenholtz (1985) focused on how the leadership behaviors of school principals contributed to teacher progress toward goals in urban elementary schools. By manipulating how tightly or loosely coupled the educational system was structured, the principal was able to affect the performance of
staff members toward goal targets. Marsh and Crocker’s (1991) work supported the importance of people to the implementation process, but it also identified that places—sites where implementation occurs—have a significant influence on policy implementation. Their study focused on the extent to which eight California middle schools implemented components of a state-derived middle school reform package. Findings indicated that implementation occurred differently across sites due to contextual factors such as adverse labor relations.

Researchers in this era also extended some of the arguments of the past decade. For example, McDonnell and Elmore (1987) expanded on previous work that argued policy design mattered to implementation. By matching policy instruments—mandates, inducements, capacity building, and system changing—to the implementer’s context, policy designs could better motivate the desired change (Honig, 2006; McDonnell & Elmore).

**Policy implementation research wave four: Contemporary approaches.** The evolution of the standards movement throughout the 1990s and 2000s has contributed to a fundamental shift in focus for implementation research (Honig, 2006). Contemporary approaches to policy implementation research focus heavily on the interdependence between policies, people, and places while recognizing the influence the implementer has in shaping the policy design (Honig, 2006). According to Honig (2006), “whereas past implementation research generally revealed that policy, people, and places affected implementation, contemporary implementation research specifically aims to uncover
their various dimensions and how and why interactions among these dimensions shape implementation in particular ways” (p. 14).

**Policy implementation conceptual framework.** Honig (2006) extended her understanding of contemporary approaches to policy implementation research by developing a framework that situates policies, people, and places at disparate points on a triangle. From these positions, the three components interact to produce an implementation result. To fully capture how these components network, a brief explanation of each component is provided with examples from the literature explaining how they influence the implementation result.

**Policies.** Contemporary policy designs have three key elements: goals, targets, and tools (Honig, 2006). Goals refer to what the policy hopes to achieve when implemented. Goals can vary widely and the scope, timeframe, and language of such policy goals can have far-reaching effects on implementers’ ability to carry out the policies as prescribed (Honig, 2006). For example, Hill (2006) found that the language used to communicate policies could make implementation problematic if the policy architects and implementers belonged to different communities of discourse.

The targets of policy designs reference those individuals who are targeted by the intent of a policy. Depending on their position toward a policy, targets can positively or negatively influence implementation (Honig, 2006). Malen (2006) contributed to this understanding with the assertion that policy implementation is inherently political. She proposed a framework for policy implementation analysis that offers opportunities to examine the reciprocal relationships between policy initiatives and the implementing
actors or policy targets. In her framework, Malen asserts that the political interests of a policy’s target(s) can push back on the intent of a policy and shape an altogether different policy outcome than policymakers had prescribed.

Finally, policy tools can influence the implementation result (Honig, 2006). Policy instruments or tools—such as top-down mandates, bottom-up change efforts, incentives, funding structures, and regulations—can all work to shape what actually is implemented in schools (Honig, 2001, 2006; Odden, 1991).

**People.** Although those individuals who are the targets of policies are considered with the policy design, Honig (2006) suggested that those interested in policy implementation also need to consider the interests of all actors within an educational system—formal and informal. The roles that central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and students play in the policy implementation process need to be considered because the varying interests and beliefs of these groups influence the implementation outcome. Moreover, different subgroups within these broad categories deserve attention because groups within a system are far from homogeneous. For example, in his study of two school districts, Spillane (1998) found that significant variation existed with regard to policy implementation even within school districts. Here, different actors may understand and place differing priorities on implementation outcomes.

The people aspect of policy implementation also must account for the notion that groups within school systems form strong communities of practice. Coburn and Stein (2006) discovered that group membership by teachers was an integral component to how
they interpreted and implemented curricular policy. Similarly, Spillane, Reiser, and Gomez (2006) concluded that “what is understood from and about policy is defined in the interactions among implementing agents” (p. 63). Hill’s (2006) discovery that membership in different communities of discourse also supports the claim that group membership affects policy interpretation and implementation.

**Places.** Location and sites related to policy implementation also can have a significant impact on the implementation outcome. In their study of state-level education agency involvement with implementation of policy reforms associated with No Child Left Behind, Hamann and Lane (2004) found that state education agencies acted as an important site where policy was interpreted. Policy interpretations differed greatly between the different agencies and, as a result, implementation differed between implementation sites.

State-level agencies are not the only sites that can have an impact on policy implementation. O’Day (2002) found that different school systems and central offices can help or hinder lasting school reform. Comparing approaches to accountability in Chicago (Illinois) Public Schools and Baltimore City (Maryland) Schools, O’Day concluded that the administrative and professional accountability model in Baltimore presented a more promising approach to policy implementation than did Chicago’s bureaucratic accountability model.

Finally, differences between and among large geographic locations can influence policy implementation (Honig, 2006). Issues of race, class, and culture that are unique to different areas can play out during the implementation process and cause differences in
how policies take shape over time (Honig, 2006). These differences present challenges for policies that seek to engage multiple sites with the same policy prescriptions, such as the CCSS.

**An Opportunity to Combine Frameworks: Inspiration from Studies of Central Office Leadership**

Placed side-by-side, similarities between distributed leadership theory and policy implementation theory emerge. The importance of interdependence permeates both—it for a leadership or an implementation outcome. Merging the two frameworks holds promise for addressing the inability of distributed leadership to speak to the influence of power throughout the leadership continuum. The dynamic interplay of policy, people, and places in the policy implementation framework presented by Honig (2006) can help develop a mediated understanding of how influence ebbs and flows throughout implementation. Additionally, combining frameworks offers an opportunity to build from the small number of empirical studies that already—in small part—mirror tenets of both conceptual frameworks.

This final section explores two empirical works that employ the school district central office as their unit of analysis. These studies hint at a strong connection between distributed leadership and policy implementation conceptual frameworks and serve as an inspiration for a combined framework. The section concludes by providing a visual representation and description of a combined conceptual framework that merges distributed leadership, leadership for learning, and policy implementation for leadership of the CCSS.
**Empirical works.** In her case study research that followed central office administrative roles in their work to support implementation of school-community partnerships in Oakland, California, Honig (2003) concluded that interdependent relationships between central office administrators and site-based implementers was an important determinant to implementation success. This observation is indicative of the conjoint agency (Gronn, 2002) component of distributed leadership. In this case, close personal relationships among implementing actors at school sites and central office administrators were crucial (Honig). As Honig pointed out, “almost all respondents indicated that such ties between individual central office administrators and site directors were critical especially in Oakland where years of city-level governments’ nonresponsiveness to neighborhood concerns fueled sites’ unwillingness to share information” (p. 322).

A subsequent study by Honig et al. (2010) investigated the connection between school district central office leadership and improved teaching and learning. The researchers found that “improving teaching and learning district-wide is a systems problem—a challenge that requires the participation of both central offices and schools in leadership roles to realize such outcomes” (p. 117). In this way, central office leadership adopted the practice aspect of distributed leadership and worked to have leadership “stretched over” (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 25) district-wide improvement efforts. As Honig et al. explained,

Central offices that intentionally set out to improve teaching and learning as joint work with schools created the basis for ongoing dialogue about where and how efforts are and are not working, and where more support is needed, enabling smarter, more transparent decisions. (p. 117)
The intentionality of central office efforts to lead for joint work also connects to the findings from a quantitative study on distributed leadership in schools by Mascall et al. (2008). As a result of their survey research of 1,640 elementary and secondary teachers, they concluded that effective distributed leadership needs to be coordinated leadership. Having leaders working in formal capacities work to facilitate this coordination seems an appropriate goal.

**Toward a merged conceptual framework.** Merging the policy implementation framework presented by Honig (2006), by incorporating conceptualizations of distributed leadership that focus on the leader-plus, practice, and conjoint agency concepts (Spillane, 2005, 2006; Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2008), and by borrowing from the steadfast focus on student learning offered by the leadership for learning framework (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Murphy, Elliot, & Goldring, 2007), a new conceptual framework for leadership of the CCSS is formed. This framework has three key areas that must be considered (Figure 2).
Figure 2. A conceptual framework for implementation of the CCSS.

First, the three exterior circles represent the influence that policies, people, and places have on the implementation outcome. In this instance, policy aims are those that are associated with the CCSS—the current iteration of the standards-based reform movement that replaces disparate state-derived curricular standards with national standards developed in settings far from the implementation site. Policy actors include central office administrators, building administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other community members that have an interest in the educational system. Local context refers to what Honig (2006) terms as “places.” It involves influence that encompasses the values and beliefs of the community within which the implementing schools are located and accounts for the historical and institutional norms associated with the schools and district.
Second, the outer ring represents distributed leadership. In this instance, distributed leadership acts as the “glue” (Elmore, 2002, p. 15) that holds policies, people, and places together as they work toward a mediated understanding for implementation. In addition, owing to the assertion that distributed leadership must be coordinated leadership (Leithwood et al., 2006), the outer ring references intentionality on the part of district leaders working to facilitate a mediated implementation of the CCSS. District leaders work deliberately to “stretch” (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 25) leadership over the continuum of constituents so that interdependence is fostered and conjoint agency (Gronn, 2002) is achieved.

The outer ring also evidences the steadfast focus on student learning that is the hallmark characteristic of leadership for learning (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Murphy, Elliot, & Goldring, 2007). Superintendents work to put in place systems, strategies, and supports that communicate the importance of a coherent, learning-focused implementation result.

Finally, the center circle represents the CCSS as implemented within a school or school district. When implementation has occurred, it is focused on student learning and is a reflection of the influence imparted by policies, people, and places. And, if successful, the distributed approach to leadership will have facilitated an implementation process that promotes harmony and interdependence amongst the influence shared by policies, people, and places.
Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of standards-based reform in public education, the changing conceptualization of the superintendency, and leadership for learning. In addition, the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of distributed leadership and policy implementation were explored with specific reference to the empirical anchors that inform both. Owing to the similarities between distributed leadership and policy implementation, and connecting to empirical works (Honig, 2003; Honig et al., 2010) that have hinted at a connection between tenets of distributed leadership and the policy implementation framework developed by Honig (2006), a merged framework for leadership of the CCSS was presented. This framework also incorporated components of the leadership for learning framework (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Murphy, Elliot, & Goldring, 2007) and it served as inspiration for a descriptive case study. The study sought to gain insight into one school district superintendent’s leadership behaviors as she facilitated leadership for implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The ability of district superintendents to appropriately understand and provide leadership for school district adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is of paramount importance in the current landscape of educational reform. School districts, administrators, and teachers will be held accountable for student performance on standardized measures of academic performance associated with the CCSS. This importance drives the need for a thorough understanding of the associated leadership behaviors of the implementing school district superintendent. Therefore, this case study examined the leadership behaviors of one school district superintendent as she worked to make sense of and lead the implementation of the CCSS within her school district. This chapter provides the research questions for the study, a description of the methodology, the population, sample selection, data collection methodology, and data analysis procedures that were utilized.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what behaviors and activities does an effective superintendent engage when leading the implementation of the CCSS?

2. How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?

3. What challenges did the superintendent face when working to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?
Research Design

In selecting the research design for a study, the researcher must consider that form closely follows function. The type of research design selected is influenced by the researcher’s philosophical worldviews and the problem he/she seeks to solve (Creswell, 2009). Philosophical ideas, while largely hidden in research, do influence practice (Creswell, 2009). The basic beliefs delineated by these ideas define for the holder ways of thinking and taking action (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 2009). Scholars disagree on the general categorization of philosophical worldviews, but a brief review of the literature returned several prominent worldviews: postpositivism, social constructivism, advocacy/participatory/transformative, and pragmatism (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2009).

Because this study sought to understand how school district superintendents work to make sense of the CCSS and lead for implementation in their local setting, this study is closely matched to the social constructivist worldview. In this worldview, the lens of research is focused on the processes of interactions among individuals and also is focused on developing an understanding about what people do in the world in which they live and work (Creswell, 2009).

The identified social constructivist worldview, coupled with research questions that sought to describe how one superintendent engaged in CCSS policy sense-making and led for implementation in the school district setting, made a qualitative research design ideal for this study. A case study strategy of inquiry was used in order to develop a deeper understanding of the behaviors and activities in which a school superintendent
engaged with regard to CCSS implementation, the effect distributed leadership had on
CCSS implementation, and the challenges the superintendent faced as she worked to
unite stakeholder visions surrounding CCSS implementation.

With the lens of this study firmly oriented on the superintendent as the unit of
analysis, the need for a strategy of inquiry that acknowledged the importance of context
was essential. Case study research was ideal because it allowed the study to focus on the
holistic and meaningful characteristics of the school district site within which the
superintendent operated (Yin, 2009). Additionally, this study was informed by three
conceptual frameworks: distributed leadership, leadership for learning, and policy
implementation theory. Unlike other qualitative strategies of inquiry that seek to develop
a theory, case study “benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to
guide data collection and analysis” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

Population, Site Selection, and Participants

The participant and site for this study was selected using a purposeful, chained-
referral sampling method. Purposeful sampling is common in qualitative research and
involves selecting sites and participants that will help the researcher address the focus of
the research study (Creswell, 2009; Krathwohl, 2009). Chained-referral sampling, which
also is termed snowball or referential sampling, involves seeking the names of sites or
individuals from others who may have knowledge of those meeting the criteria
established in the study (Krathwohl, 2009).
The population for this study included school district superintendents in the state of Illinois. Because the CCSS have been adopted by Illinois (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.), the potential sample was quite large. For example, according to the most recent report available from the Illinois State Board of Education (2012), there are 868 public school districts in Illinois. To assist in narrowing the lens of possible research sites, nominations and referrals for participants were sought from the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), Illinois Regional Offices of Education (ROE), and professional contacts of the researcher. A 25-member governing board representative of 21 geographic regions organizes the IASA. There are 56 ROEs that represent various counties in Illinois. Each ROE is led by an elected superintendent. These individuals were contacted (Appendices A-C) and were asked to recommend school district superintendents who fit the following criteria:

- The superintendent is heavily involved in curricular leadership and is an active participant in the school district’s implementation of the CCSS.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has been well received by staff, students, parents, and/or community members.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has a reputation as a model for other school districts.
- The superintendent has served in his/her position with the same district for at least three consecutive years.

In selecting a site for the study, diversity in student demographics, district enrollments, grade levels served, and geographic locations were sought. In addition, school district sites that were considered must have been deemed academically successful to be considered for inclusion in the proposed study. Only school districts that were
meeting or exceeding, or had demonstrated progress toward meeting or exceeding, standards of student achievement on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) and/or the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE) would be included in the pool of nominees.

As potential study sites were identified, the superintendents were contacted by email to inform them of their nomination (Appendices D and E). Each nominated superintendent was asked about his/her willingness to participate in the study and, if they agreed, were asked to participate in an initial telephone interview that was conducted by the researcher (Appendix F). The initial interview served two purposes. First, it helped to screen nominees against the criteria associated with the identified theoretical propositions previously outlined. Second, these interviews continued the chained-referral process. The initial nominees were asked to provide additional superintendent referrals.

The nomination process was conducted between the months of May and September 2013. Multiple superintendent participants were interviewed and in September 2013, after extensive efforts, one qualified superintendent was selected for in-depth study.

**Ethical Considerations and Validity**

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (Appendix G). Informed consent was obtained from all participants in advance of interviews or observations, and the informed consent forms clearly articulated the participants’ rights as human subjects (Appendices
Interview questions and observation protocols guided researcher/participant interactions (Appendices L-P). Interview and observation data were transcribed using pseudonyms, and no data was shared that contained identifiable information. One exception was persons associated with professional transcription of audiotapes.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative validity refers to the efforts the researcher utilizes to ensure the accuracy of their findings. This study employed three strategies to establish validity. First, triangulation occurred, utilizing two or more sources of information to justify the themes that emerged during data analysis (Creswell, 2009; Krathwohl, 2009). This study compared and contrasted the coded interview data of respondents with site observation data and documents. Second, member checks were conducted to enhance findings by involving participants in the review of data. Member checking does not mean involving participants in the review of raw data, but instead “the researcher takes back parts of the polished product, such as themes” (Creswell, p. 191). Interview transcripts were returned to each participant for member checks to ensure that their responses were recorded correctly and also to provide them with an opportunity to revise or expand upon their responses. Additionally, emergent themes identified through review of the data were provided to participants, and their responses were used to confirm whether the identified themes were a true representation of their views. Finally, a rich and thick description of each site and the participants is provided. Creswell explained that “when qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting, for example, or provide many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer. This procedure can add to the validity of the findings” (p. 192).
Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through interviews, site observations, and document analysis. Yin (2009) contends that “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (p. 106). Interviews may be conducted one-on-one, or in small focus groups of 6-10 people (Creswell, 2009; Krathwohl, 2009).

Qualitative interviews should operate as guided conversations; although a protocol that includes defined questions is necessary, the interview should be open-ended in nature (Yin, 2009). The interview protocol should include the following key components: (a) standard interview procedures to be followed from one interview to the next; (b) the questions; (c) probes for the questions; and plans for recording information form the interviews (Creswell, 2009).

This study employed semi-structured one-on-one and focus group interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the superintendent; the initial interview followed an established protocol (Appendix F) and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Although the superintendent had consented to participate in the study, attaining regular access was more challenging than had been anticipated, due to her busy schedule and professional commitments. However, three subsequent interviews with the superintendent were conducted as the study unfolded, to obtain additional clarification of her responses and to expand upon emergent themes. These follow-up interviews, which lasted 30-45 minutes, occurred by phone.

A focus group interview was conducted with a group of administrators and CCSS implementing instructional coaches/teachers. This interview followed an established
protocol (Appendix N), lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, and was conducted on site. Follow-up interviews (Appendix O)—two in the case of one participant—were conducted with each member of the focus group. Members of the focus group were asked to more fully elaborate on themes identified through the first superintendent and focus group interviews.

All interviews were audiorecorded, and professionals and the researcher transcribed the recordings. In the event a participant was uncomfortable being audiorecorded, he/she was permitted to request that the researcher take detailed notes in lieu of the audiorecording. Interviewees had the option to stop the interview at any time. All personally identifiable information was removed during transcription and the original recordings were deleted following receipt of the transcriptions. Copies of the transcribed interviews were sent to participants by email for member checks, and interviewees had an opportunity to clarify or amend their responses by email.

In addition to interviews, this study employed site observations. In case study research, site visits provide another source of meaningful data because they offer an opportunity to observe phenomena in their natural setting (Yin, 2009). Site observations range from casual to formal and may include the researcher as a participant or observer (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009). Much like an interview protocol, an observational protocol should be included to guide the researcher’s behavior. This protocol should include plans for descriptive notes (Creswell, 2009). Krathwohl (2009) suggests descriptive observational notes contribute to a rich, thick description of the site and should include:

- reflections on the processes of selecting what was important to capture;
• behavior in the situation (comfort, obtrusiveness, apparent impact on others, treatment by others);

• ideas or hypotheses explaining what was occurring;

• problems in observing, recording or coding; and

• suggestions for the next steps and from whence they were derived, and so on. (p. 272)

Two site observations were completed for this study. One site observation involved observing a meeting between middle school language arts teachers as they worked to plan for implementation of the CCSS; this observation was approximately two 2 hours. A second observation was one full day and focused on a variety of CCSS focused meetings at all grade levels on an Ericsson School District institute day.

Site observation meetings were not recorded, but a rich and thick description of the first observation was notated using the observation protocol (Appendix P). Prior to beginning the first observation, all participants were notified of their rights as human subjects and were asked to sign an informed consent form. If a participant had declined consent, his/her comments would not have been included in the field notes; however, no observation participants requested this option. Field notes for the first observation focused specifically on the theoretical propositions previously defined. Observation notes were transcribed and personally identifiable information was removed and replaced with pseudonyms. The transcribed notes were emailed to participants, and participants had the opportunity to clarify or amend their responses by email.

Due to the large number of staff members observed during the second observation, informed consent forms were not circulated. General notes were drafted
throughout the observation and no personally identifiable information or quotations were noted. Because of the large number of staff observed (nearly all district teachers and administrators), notes were not emailed to participants for member checks.

Finally, a review of documents and other pertinent written materials was conducted. Creswell (2009) indicated that public and private documents may be valuable data sources because they represent data that are a thoughtful creation of participants in their own words. CCSS meeting agendas, School Board notices, and other curricular documents were used to support or refute themes that emerged through analysis of the data collected through interviews and observations.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

In its simplest form, “data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 175). In this process, the researcher must work to identify the relevant themes that emerge from the data (Merriam, 2009). This process of identifying themes from qualitative data is a creative one that involves making judgments about what is significant and what is not (Patton, 2002).

According to Yin (2009), analyzing case study evidence is “one of the most difficult aspects of doing case studies” (p. 126). To assist in simplifying this process, Merriam (2009) suggested that qualitative data analysis be conceptualized as an inductive and deductive process that has a beginning, middle, and end. The process of analyzing the data begins with an inductive approach, moves to an approach that includes both inductive and deductive reasoning during the middle phase, and graduates with a
deductive approach (Merriam). Within this model, a step-by-step process should be employed to give structure to the analysis. This process includes: (a) organizing and preparing data for analysis, (b) reading through all of the data, (c) constructing themes, (d) sorting themes and data, (e) naming themes, (f) reducing the number of relevant themes, and (g) interpreting the meaning of the themes (Creswell, 2009; Merriam). Data analysis is an ongoing process that is conducted concurrently with data collection (Creswell, 2009). While interview and field data were being collected, transcriptions and notes were reviewed to assist in making sense of the data.

To begin the inductive phase of data analysis, all data collected were organized by type. Once data were organized, they were coded to assist in identifying emergent themes. Transcribed interviews and field notes were coded using a line-by-line method that involved making notations in the margins of the page. The transcribed interviews and field notes were read and notated several times to ensure they had been indexed completely (Patton, 2002). When initial data coding had been completed, the notations in the margins of the page were compared to determine relevant themes. Thematic headings were created based on common codes that were identified and digital file folders were created for each heading. Coded data units were placed in the appropriate folders throughout data collection and analysis.

One advantage to collecting and analyzing data concurrently included the ability to move naturally from an inductive process focused on developing themes, to a deductive approach concerned with validating themes with subsequent data (Merriam, 2009). This process continued until the thematic folders reached saturation, a point in
which “no new information, insights, or understandings are forthcoming” (Merriam, 2009). This deductive process allowed for the selection of a final list of relevant, robust thematic headings.

Finally, interpretation of the identified themes took place. Interpretation of the data was concerned with identifying key lessons from the thematic narrative and involved relating themes to personal perspectives as well as theoretical propositions identified in the literature (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Data themes were interpreted with particular attention to the researcher’s personal perspectives as well as the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Two.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology for the case study that examined the leadership behavior of one school district superintendent as she lead for implementation of the CCSS within her school district. Interviews (Appendix Q), site observations (Appendix R), and document review were employed to foster the development of a rich and thick description of the study site. Emergent themes were determined for the study site.

This study is significant because it can help to inform practice of district-level leaders as they work to lead implementation of the CCSS and other centralized educational policy initiatives. Because recent educational reforms suggest further centralization of classroom initiatives are to be more prevalent, there was no better time
to investigate further the leadership practices of district superintendents who help their organizations successfully navigate such reforms.
Chapter 4

Findings

This study investigated the leadership behaviors of one Illinois school district superintendent as she provided leadership for implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in her school district. The following three research questions guided this study:

1. In what behaviors and activities does an effective superintendent engage when leading the implementation of the CCSS?

2. How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?

3. What challenges did the superintendent face when working to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?

General Structure for Reported Findings of the Study

This chapter opens by setting the context within which the superintendent’s leadership was studied. A detailed description of the research site, research participants, and timeline for the school district’s implementation of the CCSS is provided. Next, emergent themes derived from analysis of interview, observation, and document data are discussed in relation to each of the research questions. Analysis of the data was informed by the established conceptual framework introduced in Chapter Two, which situates CCSS implementation at the center of the policy aims associated with the CCSS, the local context within which CCSS implementation occurred, and the lived experiences those implementing the CCSS bring to the classroom. The conceptual framework posits that purposeful distributed leadership for learning from the superintendent (Copland &
Knapp, 2006; Elmore, 2002; Gronn, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2006; Murphy, Elliot, & Goldring, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) is supportive of effective CCSS implementation. Using the established conceptual framework, nine themes emerged from the data. These themes are presented in relation to the research questions, with supporting data shared.

**Context of the School District**

The majority of the data collection for this case study occurred between September 2013 and March 2014 in Ericsson School District (pseudonym). Ericsson School District, a kindergarten through eighth grade school district, serves approximately 3,000 students who live in portions of six suburban communities in the greater Chicagoland area. The district contains seven school buildings; pre-school and kindergarten students attend the district’s early childhood center, students in grades 1-5 attend one of Ericsson’s four elementary schools, and students in grades 6-8 attend one of the district’s two middle schools.

Ericsson School District is comprised primarily of middle- to upper-class families. According to the Illinois Report Card, 11% of students were classified as low-income during the 2013-2014 school year and district per-pupil expenditures outpaced the Illinois state average for instructional and operational expenditures. In 2013-2014, the district allocated approximately $8,000 per pupil for instructional expenditures and slightly more than $13,000 per pupil for operational expenditures. Instructional and
operational expenditures in Ericsson School District outpaced the State of Illinois averages by approximately $1,000 for each category in 2013-2014.

The district’s students are primarily White, comprising 63% of the district’s enrollment in 2013-2014. Asian students comprised 21% of the district’s population, Hispanic approximately 8%, multiracial students 6%, and African American students 1%. A 5-year trend report from the Illinois Report Card revealed that student demographics had changed significantly over the 5-year period: The district’s White majority was reduced by over 10% and Hispanic and Asian enrollments increased proportionately.

In 2013-2014, 14% of the Ericsson School District student population received special education support. According to the Illinois Report Card, this proportion was consistent with the Illinois school district average. Ten percent of students were classified as English Language Learners, which also was consistent with Illinois state averages.

Students in Ericsson School District significantly outperform their Illinois peers on standardized measures of academic achievement. Over a 3-year period, Ericsson students substantially scored higher than their peers on the reading, mathematics, and science portions of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). Standardized achievement data also indicate that this performance was sustained; in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, 96% of Ericsson students met or exceeded standards on the ISAT reading test and 98% achieved meet/exceeds standards on the mathematics test. In 2012-2013, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards on ISAT fell to 87% for reading and math, but this decline coincided with the introduction of a new series of cut scores for the ISAT test. If new cut scores had not been established, the Illinois Report Card
indicated 95% of Ericsson students would have met or exceeded standards in reading while 97% would have attained these standards in mathematics. From 2010-2011 to 2012-2013, at least 95% of Ericsson students met or exceeded standards on the ISAT science exam each year.

In all academic areas assessed by standardized measures—reading, mathematics, and science—Ericsson students scored significantly higher than their Illinois peers, approximately 15 percentage points higher than the Illinois average in all areas. However, despite excellent performance, Ericsson School District did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2012-2013 in reading and mathematics. In 2012-2013, Illinois schools were required to have 100% of their students meet or exceed standards on reading and mathematics to attain AYP.

Although Ericsson School District evidenced very strong academic achievement in the aggregate, room for growth was manifest in subgroup areas. Several disparities between subgroups on ISAT were noted on the 5-year comparison available from the Illinois Report Card. White students outperformed their African American and Hispanic peers on all ISAT assessments. However, while African American students closed the achievement gap to within a few percentage points of their White peers in recent school years, a significant gap persisted for Hispanic students. In 2012-2013, Hispanic students scored 21 percentage points below their White peers in science, 29 percentage points below in reading, and 32 percentage points below in mathematics.

Students receiving special education supports through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or students classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP)
also evidenced scores well below the district average. The trend analysis available through the Illinois Report Card showed IEP students averaged a 15 percentage deficit compared to general education peers in reading between 2009-2010 and 2012-2013. In the same span of time, IEP students averaged a 10 percentage deficit in mathematics. In science, IEP students trailed their general education peers by 12 percentage points in the same time frame. In 2012-2013, with the introduction of the new ISAT cut scores, the gap between general education and special education students intensified; students with an IEP scored 35 percentage points below general education students in reading and 31 percentage points below general education peers in mathematics.

LEP students mirrored the performance of students with an IEP, albeit at a more exaggerated level. Five-year trend data revealed LEP students scored an average of 31 percentage points below their general education peers in reading, 17 percentage points below in mathematics, and 29 percentage points below in science between 2009-2010 and 2012-2013. Similar to Ericsson students with an IEP, LEP students declined sharply in reading and mathematics in 2012-2013. LEP students scored 50 percentage points below general education students in reading and 45 points below in mathematics.

Stakeholders in Ericsson School District enjoy slightly smaller class sizes than other Illinois school districts. In 2012-2013, the average class size in Ericsson classrooms was 20—one student less than the Illinois average. Ericsson School District students are served by 227 teachers averaging 12.8 years of teaching experience; nearly 70% of Ericsson teachers possess a master’s degree or higher.
Ericsson School District has received multiple awards for excellence. The district has received the AAA bond rating for eight consecutive years from the Illinois State Board of Education—and award that places Ericsson School District within the top 20 Illinois school districts in terms of fiscal performance. Four schools—two middle schools and two elementary buildings—have earned National Blue Ribbon School recognition from the United States Department of Education. One middle school earned Blue Ribbon honors for a second time in 2013. In 2012, Ericsson School District was one of only 79 Illinois school districts to earn the Bright Red Apple for educational excellence. In addition, Ericsson School District’s schools have been recipients of Top 50 honors from the Chicago Sun Times and Top 15 honors from Chicago Magazine.

The administrative team for Ericsson School District was comprised of the superintendent, three assistant superintendents, five directors, one coordinator, six principals, and two assistant principals. At the central office level, the leadership of Superintendent Hannah spanned all areas of the organization—teaching and learning, personnel, and finance. Each assistant superintendent was tasked with providing further leadership in each of these three areas with Assistant Superintendent Grace assigned to teaching and learning. Assistant Superintendent Grace, who was primarily responsible for implementation of the CCSS, was supported by two directors. These directors included Director of Technology Jason and Director of Curriculum and Assessment Garrett.

In addition to the administrative leadership team, Ericsson School District possessed a robust instructional coaching support system. All of the district’s teachers received teaching and learning support from instructional coaches in the following areas:
mathematics, literacy, technology, information literacy, extended learning, and science. During data collection for this study, Ericsson teachers were supported by 26 instructional coaches across the district. Most instructional coaches were assigned to a single school, but some had duties that required them to travel between schools. While their roles did not preclude them from working with students, they were primarily a direct support for teachers. They were available to provide professional coaching to support improved teaching and learning in the classroom. In addition, instructional coaches provided leadership for the development of CCSS aligned curriculum maps and assessments at all grade levels.

**Description of Superintendent Hannah**

Throughout data collection, Superintendent Hannah was engaged in her fourth year of service as Superintendent of Schools for Ericsson School District. Her career in education began nearly 30 years prior to this study. She completed her undergraduate studies at a private, church-affiliated university in the southern United States, later earning a master’s degree in school psychology from a public university in that same state. She currently is completing her doctoral studies in educational leadership from an Illinois public university.

Hannah began her career as a school psychologist in a north suburban Illinois high school district. After 5 years of experience as a school psychologist, Hannah moved to the central office as Assistant to the Superintendent in the same district. In that role, she was considered a member of the superintendent’s cabinet, and she was responsible
for recommending School Board policy revisions to the superintendent, assisting with preparation for Board of Education meetings, and reviewing relevant district survey data. Subsequently, she became the Director of Student Services at one of the district’s high schools. As a Director of Student Services—a role to which she would return after serving as the district’s Assistant Director for Special Education for a one-year appointment—she supervised and evaluated numerous certified and non-certified staff members. The role of Director for Student Services also included a significant managerial component that was not present in her previous roles; as a director she was responsible for developing master building schedules, coordinating test administration, and facilitating the placement of freshman students.

After several years at the high school level, Hannah moved to the elementary grades in Ericsson School District. As the Associate Superintendent and District Director of Student Services, Hannah continued work to supervise programming in the areas of special education and guidance. However, her role expanded considerably to include a focus on teaching and learning, sizable budget management, and a variety of district and area curriculum leadership positions. As Associate Superintendent, Hannah facilitated curriculum development, managed a multi-million dollar budget, and connected with area districts for the purpose of studying social-emotional learning standards.

After 5 years of service in Ericsson School District as the Associate Superintendent, Hannah was promoted to the role of Superintendent of Schools. In addition, Hannah simultaneously began working as an educational consultant. Since 2010, she has facilitated professional development focused on Professional Learning...
Communities, Response to Intervention, and a variety of topics associated with closing the achievement gap between general and special education students in the United States and Canada.

**Ericsson Timeline for Common Core State Standards Implementation**

The Common Core State Standards are still new to school districts in Illinois and across the United States. In Illinois, the CCSS were adopted in June 2010 with full implementation required in the 2013-14 school year (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Ericsson School District was an early adopter of the CCSS; according to Superintendent Hannah, the district put together a team of three administrators to attend a national conference on the CCSS recently after the release of the standards. After the three administrators returned from the conference, Superintendent Hannah shared,

They came back to me, and it was midyear, so we certainly had our district-level goals established for the current year. So they came back and we sat down and we dug into it and they said, we can’t wait ’til next year. We can’t wait until we develop a new set of district goals in order to start this work. . . . I said, well, what I need you to do is, I need you to let’s figure out where we would start. They said, well, certainly our greatest area of need is reading and writing, so let’s take a look at that.

Not wanting to proceed without teacher input, Superintendent Hannah directed her administrative team members to seek feedback on the CCSS implementation timeline from teachers in district “job-alike” meeting structures. Feedback from teachers pressed the district to move toward CCSS implementation sooner than it otherwise would have. Superintendent Hannah elaborated,

The reason that we started very, very early is because as soon as Common Core was released, we did a preview of it in what we call a job-alike structure in our
district—so, teachers who teach common curriculum. And, actually, our plan had been to dive into it a year later, but our teachers actually demanded that we start that work right away, because they felt so strongly that the new Common Core Standards were more specific and more rigorous and were [going to be] better for our student population. So we jumped in right away with a very much tiered approach to implementation over a four-year period.

The foundation for implementation of the CCSS was put in place midway through the 2010-11 school year, when the Ericsson Board of Education approved a formal goal to “begin transition to the State of Illinois adopted Common Core Learning Standards.”

When the CCSS implementation goal was established, the timeline for implementation was not specific, nor were there traditional means of assessing the effectiveness of the implementation effort. Information about and materials for CCSS implementation were still in development. As such, Superintendent Hannah and her administrative team worked to stay one step ahead of the district’s teachers in order to support implementation. Superintendent Hannah explained:

Someone would go out and would learn a piece, and we really sat and we had to learn together. As our teachers and coaches dug in, we had to sit and learn together because there were many times—there have been many times, and there will continue to be, during this implementation, where we really from a leadership perspective are barely staying one step ahead of our teachers, because they’re asking such complex questions about implementation.

Additionally, the Illinois student learning assessment associated with CCSS implementation—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) test—was not due to be released until the 2014-15 school year. Because of the late release of the PARCC assessment, Ericsson School District did not have a readily accessible metric for evaluating the efficacy of the CCSS implementation effort; district
staff needed to rely on their personal perceptions and collective judgment to determine if they were on the right path.

Even though Ericsson leadership struggled to stay one step ahead of implementation and assessments of CCSS implementation efficacy were not available, Ericsson School District achieved a reputation for being a CCSS model district. A statewide search in Illinois recognized Ericsson School District as leading the field of Illinois school districts for CCSS implementation. Moreover, the leadership efforts of Superintendent Hannah were directly credited for the success of Ericsson’s effective transition to the CCSS.

To better understand the leadership behaviors of Superintendent Hannah, 11 interviews were conducted. These interviews included Superintendent Hannah, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace, Elementary Principal Rose, Middle School Assistant Principal Erik, Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria, and Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn (Table 1).

Table 1

*Interview Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff pseudonym</th>
<th>Staff Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Ericsson Superintendent of Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>Ericsson Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Ericsson Elementary Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erik</td>
<td>Ericsson Middle School Assistant Principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Ericsson Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathryn</td>
<td>Ericsson Elementary School Literacy Coach and Teacher</td>
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In addition, two site observations totaling approximately 9 hours were completed in January and February 2014. Both site observations provided me with an opportunity to directly observe administrators, coaches, and teachers working collaboratively to develop shared understandings of the CCSS and develop implementation plans. Interview and site observation participants also provided numerous documents that were used to contribute to the identification of relevant themes.

The remainder of this chapter presents findings related to each of the three research questions posed in this study. These questions explored the leadership behaviors of Superintendent Hannah as she guided CCSS implementation within the district. Data were analyzed through the lens of the conceptual framework developed in Chapter Two.

**Research Question #1: In What Behaviors and Activities Does an Effective Superintendent Engage When Leading the Implementation of the CCSS?**

The first research question focused on Superintendent Hannah’s behaviors as she provided leadership for implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District. Data revealed four key themes that contributed to effective implementation of the CCSS: facilitating collaboration, the superintendent assessing the school system’s capacity for implementation, the superintendent developing a complete understanding of the Common Core, and the superintendent providing/coordinating professional development/coaching. Data collected through interviews, document analysis, and site observation data are presented to support the identified themes.

**Facilitating collaboration.** In initial interviews with Superintendent Hannah and focus group participants, collaboration emerged as the first theme and as an important
factor for the successful CCSS implementation. Superintendent Hannah and members of
the focus group interview team (Assistant Superintendent Grace, Elementary Principal
Rose, Middle School Assistant Principal Erik, Middle School Literacy Coach and
Teacher Maria, and Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn) frequently spoke
of the importance of collaboration. Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria
captured this sentiment: “collaborative structures are the most important part of
successful implementation. If you want people to do the work, you got to give them time
together to do it.”

Interview participants identified collaborative structures that were essential to
successful CCSS implementation. These identified collaborative structures can be
conceptualized as conforming to one of three overarching categories for collaboration:
teacher-driven collaboration, leadership support collaboration, and collaboration with
actors outside of the Ericsson school buildings. Teacher-driven collaboration occurred
between teachers and was primarily led by teachers. Discussion of teacher-driven
collaboration focused on job-alike meetings but was also inclusive of teacher team
meeting times, middle school content meetings, and institute days. Leadership support
collaboration primarily was focused on facilitating administrative job-alike meetings in
which Ericsson administrators could learn from one another and reflect on effective
leadership practices for implementation. External collaboration focused on inter-district
collaboration among Ericsson, other elementary feeder districts, and Ericsson students’
destination high school district. External collaboration also involved connections with the
larger Ericsson school community. Detailed descriptions of each structure are provided.
This subsection closes with identification of the specific leadership behaviors the superintendent contributed to facilitate the identified collaborative structures.

**Teacher-driven collaboration.** A structure Ericsson leaders described as “job-alike” meetings was referenced frequently as an important time when teachers provided input and worked specifically for CCSS implementation. Superintendent Hannah explained that the job-alike structure was part of the impetus for the early CCSS adoption. She noted that district leadership had initially planned for the CCSS implementation effort to begin one year later than it actually did. Teachers participating in job-alike meetings shared their enthusiasm for the standards and pushed for implementation to begin sooner.

Job-alike meetings occur at least once a month on scheduled early release dates and involve teachers from different buildings in the district meeting together to engage in work related to teaching and learning. Assistant Superintendent Grace explained,

> Our ongoing job-alike teams . . . meet six times a year officially . . . [on] . . . our early release days. Then, additionally at our institute days, [we] typically give them at least half the day if not more to work together. Those are teams that are, again, representatives at the elementary level from each grade level representing a certain content area. If there [are] four first grade teachers, one will attend a [language arts] meeting, one will attend a science, one will attend social studies, [and] one will attend math. They do the ongoing work of writing assessments, aligning assessment to the Common Core, tweaking pacing guides—all of the things that we need to keep doing in order to improve and get better at . . . [Common Core] . . . work.

While job-alike meetings offered teachers an opportunity to engage in meaningful work as teams of teachers working in a horizontal fashion, they also supported coordination and collaboration vertically. The structure connected teachers to Superintendent Hannah and her leadership team through teacher leaders who worked to
coordinate the job-alike meetings. Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria
explained,

There is a job-alike facilitator for every content area. For example, if I’m the
English job-alike facilitator, it’s my job to kind of create the agenda and I do that
through collaboration with Assistant Superintendent Grace . . . who also
collaborates with our superintendent. . . . It’s kind of like we’re constantly
communicating about what’s needed and what the teachers will need. The
teachers also have a voice . . . in what goes into that agenda, so if there are issues
that pop up, they are able to . . . add to the agenda.

Superintendent Hannah echoed Maria’s comment and suggested the vertical nature of the
job-alike structure was particularly meaningful for maintaining a consistent message for
the district’s efforts to implement the Common Core:

Our grade-level team, job-alike teams . . . were already meeting with very specific
things that they were working on before Common Core, but what collaboration
[in job-alike groups] has done is . . . really tightened up our communication loops
related to the why behind the work [to implement Common Core]. For instance,
administrators have the conversations about implementation and the direction
we’re going and why. They go back and have those conversations with their team
leaders. Those team leaders then have those conversations with their grade-level
teams. Having those collaborative structures in place means that people are
having the conversations and hearing the same message multiple times in multiple
collaborative groups. [It has really] help[ed] us to tighten up the communication
about vision.

The job-alike structure also was noted to provide essential time for teachers to support
one another for CCSS implementation. Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria
shared,

Those job-alike meetings are another structure that I think is crucial, especially
because you get teachers working in two different buildings, even though we’re
the same district, they need time to communicate, time to share, time to talk about
what’s working and what’s no working and making sure they’re kind of on the
same page. . . . That’s also a place where our professional learning takes place so
[teachers] can continue to get support.

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Grade-level team meetings, middle school content meetings, and institute days also were important components of teacher-driven collaboration. Superintendent Hannah reported,

I think just at the building level having that regular grade-level team time built into the school day has been really important because the grade-level colleagues have been real dependent on each other to discuss upcoming new targets, what they look like, what mastery looks like, ways to approach them, ideas on how to best teach those new targets. That’s been essential . . . as has our institute days where we tackled bigger, more system side challenges related to new targets and curriculum.

Superintendent Hannah suggested writing new formative and summative assessments aligned to the CCSS was a task well suited to grade-level meeting time and institute days due to the time-consuming nature of the task. She indicated that collaborative work by teachers in such structures was important to keeping “ahead of the instructional cycle.”

Assistant Superintendent Grace agreed; she stated that the elementary grade-level meetings and middle school grade and content specific meetings were “key to this [CCSS] work continuing and for us to keep tweaking and trying to get the curriculum in a place that we think it’s the best place it can be.”

Participation in teacher-driven collaboration was not limited to staff who were directly responsible for implementation of the CCSS in language arts and math.

Superintendent Hannah stated,

Whether they are team leaders, they’re on a grade-level team, they’re [on] content teams, coaches, administrators, all certified staff in the system have been involved in collaborating around the implementation. Even specials and elective areas have examined them for appropriateness of crossover standards, like social studies for informational text—those kind of things.
Assistant Principal Erik took Superintendent Hannah’s statement one step further and argued that CCSS implementation involved “anybody who gets a paycheck from Ericsson School District.”

Site observation data confirmed teacher-driven collaborative structures mentioned by interview participants. Job-alike, grade-level team meetings, and institute day time specifically allocated to CCSS were observed at multiple grade levels and in multiple content areas. Teacher team leaders and instructional coaches were directly observed leading work to develop a shared understanding of targets associated with the CCSS. During these meetings, teachers and coaches were empowered to reflect on implementation, make modifications to implementation plans, and collaboratively develop resources and assessments to support implementation. During meetings that occurred on the February 17, 2014 institute day, administrators were observed participating in these collaborative processes, but leadership activities were noted to be primarily fostered by teacher team leaders and instructional coaches.

In addition, teachers and coaches provided numerous documents during site observations. Documents collected were primarily housed in shared Google folders, which could be freely accessed by teachers and administrators. Teachers were noted to be using digital means to extend collaboration on pacing guides, assessments, and other planning materials associated with CCSS implementation.

**Leadership support collaboration.** Collaboration among members of the district’s administrative team also was noted to be important for successful implementation of the
CCSS. Superintendent Hannah shared that she introduced a new collaborative structure when she assumed the superintendency. She shared,

One of the newer collaborative structures we have—when I say newer I would say about four years old—is the principal job-alike meetings. Every other week elementary principals meet together and every other week middle school principals and assistant principals meet together.

These meetings were not restricted to building administrators; members of the Ericsson Teaching and Learning leadership team also supported buildings leaders during principal job-alike meetings. Superintendent Hannah explained,

[Assistant Superintendent Grace] and our curriculum people meet with them during those meetings and they really plan out their facilitation and instructional leadership part—so meaning here’s what’s coming up. What do we need to do across this system at our weekly staff meeting? What do we need to do with our leadership team to support implementation?

Superintendent Hannah attributed successful implementation of the CCSS, in part, to the principal job-alike structure. She stated,

That newer structure of a principal job-alike I think has been really important. That has helped because what it does is it helps to ensure that we have consistency across the system with what teachers are learning and how they’re being supported.

Assistant Superintendent Grace and Elementary Principal Rose affirmed the importance of principal job-alike meetings. Both leaders directly referenced the importance of these meetings when asked to identify structures that were helpful to CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District.

**External collaboration.** Collaboration with individuals outside of Ericsson School District also was noted to be important for successful CCSS implementation. Interview participants touched on two important external collaborative efforts:
engagement with parents and articulation with all of the area elementary districts that feed into Ericsson students’ destination high school district.

Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn indicated the Ericsson parent community is an involved one. She suggested the district’s parents insisted on asking for clarity regarding the direction the district moved when implementing the CCSS. Superintendent Hannah explained that the district responded to this request by working to educate the parent community about the Common Core:

We started really early trying to educate [parents] about what the differences would be, what the Common Core was, what they would be seeing as far as changes in what their kids were working on. We have what we call a parent review group that has multiple parents from each building that meets once a month where they talk about different implementation. They give feedback from a parent perspective on different things. [For Common Core], we really tapped into that parent review committee to kind of get feedback about what the buzz was out there related to [CCSS implementation] and we really have very little early buzz about it. Really, any kind of community buzz about the Common Core has really been only very recently, but we’ve been on a journey for so long. We’ve been very lucky because we haven’t had some of the parent community, and sometime political, pushback that some districts have.

Where pushback has surfaced, Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn suggested the district has worked to provide informational meetings to educate parents and allay concerns that may have been voiced.

In addition to collaborative work with parents, Ericsson School District coordinated inter-district collaboration for implementation of the CCSS. Ericsson School District is one of five K-8 districts that feed into an area high school district. Superintendent Hannah shared that she worked “really hard in conjunction with Park High School District Superintendent Karl and Morton High School to . . . [provide] time for teachers to articulate vertically about best instructional practices.” Middle School
Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria referenced the importance of this collaborative time for CCSS implementation:

It was great because of the progression of standards. You kind of could see what some of the issues were that were... popping up... We were able to... determine... where we wanted eighth graders at the end of eighth grade consortium-wide to be.

Work to lead the consortium through the work of understanding the CCSS was guided by Assistant Superintendent Grace. Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria shared,

We [the consortium] spent eight days together, and the work was led actually by Assistant Superintendent Grace... We had literally 150 teachers in the room... At that point, the Common Core was pretty new; we weren’t even familiar with the targets... Everyone was kind of learning about what they [CCSS] were and we sat down and really did the whole unpacking of the targets, and the powering together, and vertically articulated.

The success of this organized vertical collaboration effort resulted in more frequent collaboration with Park High School District and feeder district principals. Maria reported that this collaboration evolved into something where our principals and [Assistant Superintendent Grace], and the principals over at the other [feeder] schools really get together and collaborate much more frequently so that we even have these meetings like five or six times a year now.

In addition, the success of the vertical collaboration evidenced at the consortium meetings prompted Ericsson School District to utilize a similar format for implementation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Superintendent Hannah reported that the NGSS—standards for science adopted by multiple states in the United States—are currently being studied and planned for by teachers in grades 6-12 in Ericsson and Park school districts.
Superintendent Hannah’s leadership behaviors that supported collaboration.

When interviewed, respondents shared that many of the collaborative structures that contributed to the positive implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District were not new, and were the result of the district’s efforts to transform to a deeply embedded professional learning community (PLC). Superintendent Hannah explained,

Quite honestly, the genesis of all of these [collaborative] structures—none of the genesis is related to the Common Core; these are structures that we had in place well before the Common Core was adopted. The genesis for adopting each level of the collaborative structures really was related to our journey towards becoming a really deeply embedded professional learning community. Each of those structures were embedded into our schedule and into our culture.

Assistant Superintendent Grace confirmed Hannah’s explanation:

We’ve always had these collaborative structures in place. We always pulled together curricular teams when we’re doing any kind of implementation; we’ve always done that. With the Common Core, what shifted is the work just became a little bit more focused on everything involved with new standards. I would say, yes, the structures have always been in place. When we started the work of becoming a professional learning community, the first thing we did—and probably the smartest thing anyone can do is—look at your master schedules and make sure there’s time in the school day for people to meet. That is something we did probably 14 years ago. Just the way the teams work together has shifted, but for the past 14 years we’ve had these collaborative structures in place.

Even though Superintendent Hannah did not directly introduce the teacher-driven collaborative structures associated with Ericsson’s move to a PLC, her focused leadership was noted to be important for the continued success of the collaborative structures. The leadership behaviors she evidenced in support of these structures included keeping the vision for collaboration, supporting and protecting time for collaboration, and providing leadership development and support for teachers assuming the role of team leader or job-
alike facilitator. Elementary Principal Rose made reference to Superintendent Hannah’s leadership to keep the vision for collaboration:

I would say our superintendent definitely is involved. She certainly does not attend our job-alike meetings per se, but she is involved from an overarching leadership. I’m going to have to make an assumption here, but there’s a lot of discussion at her cabinet—meaning district office level administrators—about expectations and goals for implementation of the math Common Core. Then we talk about those expectations as well at our general administrative council meetings that happen every couple of weeks.

Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria elaborated,

I think [Superintendent Hannah] is definitely the one who has the vision, and she is the one who says these are the goals and these are the things I want to get done. Then, she meets with Assistant Superintendent Grace, fills in with her and says, this is my plan to get us there.

While Superintendent Hannah functioned as the keeper of the vision for collaboration, she also noted that her work in this area focused on improving feedback loops involving collaborative teacher teams. She suggested she wanted the vision for the work completed in collaborative groups to become clearer:

One of the things that has been a goal of mine—the newer Superintendent just four years in the role—is to get much clearer and kind of close some gaps that I felt we had related to feedback loops in the goal-setting process.

With her goal of closing feedback loops in mind, Hannah focused on ensuring that staff were aware of “what work is going to happen at what level and by what team.” She indicated an important part of her leadership in this area was “getting really clear on having division of responsibilities, how that’s going to be articulated, and how people are going to collaborate around [CCSS].”

Superintendent Hannah’s work to foster collaboration also included a specific focus on finding additional time and protecting opportunities for staff to collaborate
within the district calendar. Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn indicated Superintendent Hannah had been responsive to staff needs throughout implementation of the CCSS. As stressors related to CCSS implementation increased, Superintendent Hannah and her administrative leadership team increased the amount of time staff had available to collaborate. Superintendent Hannah reinforced the purposeful nature of this effort as it extended to building leadership; Kathryn explained:

"Coordinating and protecting time in our calendar every other week for principals to come together to collaborate, learn together, brainstorm together, talk about and share strategies for staff meetings—those kind of things—come to consensus on priorities. I think that that probably is the newest [collaborative] structure I was involved in coordinating.

Superintendent Hannah’s development of relationships with administrators outside of the school district also was important for external collaboration. She indicated she worked “really hard in conjunction with Park School District Superintendent Karl” to coordinate collaboration between Ericsson School District, area feeder elementary districts, and Park High School District. She observed, “that’s something that I had a big role in, because that kind of collaboration, considering we’re not in the same district, is something that really needed to be spearheaded by the superintendent.”

Superintendent assessing school system capacity. The second theme that was identified was the superintendent’s assessments of the school system’s capacity. Superintendent Hannah reported that, in her role as superintendent she “was concerned about the capacity of the system.” Assistant Superintendent Grace concurred, describing conversations that occurred regarding the capacity of the Ericsson School system to implement the CCSS:
There were a lot of conversations, definitely, about system capacity. I think we had some angst over the fact that we knew no matter how we rolled it out it was going to cause stress in the system . . . because any change of this magnitude does . . . Superintendent Hannah was very involved in that process and continues to consider the capacity of the system as we move forward.

Due to this focus, Superintendent Hannah’s continuing efforts to assess the capacity of the Ericsson School system’s ability to implement the CCSS emerged as an important theme. She explained her understanding of this process involved consideration of the timeline for implementation and a focus on “how you’re going to support implementation, and not just . . . [addressing] . . . the structure for unpacking the standards and implementing them.” Rather, Superintendent Hannah argued that careful consideration of the school system’s capacity must address the instructional implications of CCSS implementation and must be considerate of what teachers need for implementation:

I think the next piece [for CCSS implementation] is really careful consideration around the capacity of your system—the capacity of your people . . . What does that mean instructionally? What are teachers going to need in order to have the tools that are going to be necessary to implement—like the standards of practice in math . . . what are they going to need?

Superintendent Hannah’s work to assess school system capacity involved some data review. When asked to comment on Superintendent Hannah’s work to assess system capacity, Elementary Principal Rose reported that the administrative team completed robust student achievement data analysis. She indicated that because student achievement data—ISAT and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)—were becoming more fully aligned to the CCSS, it helped the administrative team to assess the capacity of the system to better implement the CCSS.
Review of quantitative data, however, was not directly referenced by Superintendent Hannah. Instead, Superintendent Hannah suggested qualitative activities best informed her appraisal of system capacity. When asked to discuss her work to assess school system capacity, she reported that “I do that on several levels.” First, she referenced work with the district and building level leadership teams:

We do that [assess system capacity] frequently in our administrative council meetings . . . I have a cabinet meeting every week and part of what we talk about is as our [professional development] and curriculum folks are out in the buildings, what are people talking about? What are the stresses? What are some of the challenges that have popped up?

Hannah also reported that she extended her work with administrators to each individual building in the district. Working with the principals, Superintendent Hannah shared,

The other things I do that are more building based is a part of the principal evaluation process . . . I always make sure that I attend at least a couple weekly staff meetings in every single building to kind of observe how those staff meetings are going, what they’re learning, how they’re interacting; what the feedback is during staff meetings; what the tone is in the building. In addition to that, I do at least a couple building walk-throughs every year with every principal . . . we walk the buildings together and have conversations about this team started going with this or this team has had the most successes with that.

Superintendent Hannah also made efforts to connect directly with teachers and staff responsible for implementing the CCSS in the classrooms. She indicated that she conducted individual conversations with staff in each building:

I hold every year in every building face-to-face feedback sessions, so how that works is I schedule it in the building and I’m there for a day. This typically happens anywhere from the end of February to spring break. I schedule a day in each building and what happens is teachers rotate in on their planning and lunch periods and have small-group conversations that are facilitated around, “Tell me how you’re feeling this year. Tell me what has gone well with the implementation. Tell me what your struggles are.” Then I ask for feedback related
to next steps of implementation for the coming year . . . By the end of [the sessions], I’ve been face-to-face with every certified and noncertified staff member in the system trying to gain some feedback.

Hannah also noted that she worked to embed herself directly in Ericsson classroom settings. She reported that she selects four district buildings each year and conducts a raffle with staff to determine which classroom she will adopt. Once the classrooms are selected, she provides support to students in the classroom. She shared,

We do a raffle system and I adopt classrooms . . . so every other week for instance this year I have a third grade classroom at Abby Elementary School and I’m there every other week during different times of the day to take guided reading groups.

Superintendent Hannah explained her purpose for being immersed in Ericsson classrooms:

I’m in those classrooms every other week. The purpose of that number one is just, it’s to get to know kids from the beginning of one year to the end of that year to kind of watch them develop. But, also, [it is] to watch the progression and pace of the curriculum. Also, it gives me really informal opportunities to see first-hand what some of the challenges are with implementation and I have real informal conversations with teachers around what’s happening week-to-week in the classroom. It gives me perspective related to some of the things that teachers are dealing with on a week-to-week basis in their classrooms.

Combined, these qualitative and quantitative approaches served to inform Superintendent Hannah’s ability to assess the Ericsson school system’s capacity for CCSS implementation.

The superintendent developing a complete understanding of the common core. A third theme that provided insight into superintendent leadership behaviors for effective Common Core implementation was the superintendent having a comprehensive understanding of the CCSS. A majority of those interviewed noted that Superintendent Hannah invested time to develop her knowledge base of the CCSS. Assistant
Superintendent Grace shared, “She understands [CCSS] on a deep level and supports it wholeheartedly. . . without that, we wouldn’t have been able to do this.” Elementary Principal Rose concurred; she indicated that Superintendent Hannah “definitely has a deep understanding of the Common Core.” Similarly, Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn shared that she believed Superintendent Hannah “does have a deep understanding of the Common Core.” Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria affirmed these statements and offered, “if she doesn’t [understand Common Core] then nothing else can work.”

Hannah and others linked this deep knowledge to the overall success of implementation efforts in Ericsson School District. This developed understanding was important for two reasons: (a) it supported her work to assess school system capacity for implementation, and (b) it reinforced effective messaging to the staff and community about CCSS implementation efforts.

Superintendent understanding of the CCSS supported work to assess school system capacity. Superintendent Hannah indicated that her knowledge of the Common Core was critical to her ability to comprehend the Ericsson school system capacity for implementation. She stated,

I guess the first thing I would say is I really needed to have a deep understanding of the implications on instructional practices because I needed to understand and to constantly measure the capacity of the system to implement the new standards and targets—to do it well and then also to understand what additional supports teachers needed around instructional practices.

As interviews with Superintendent Hannah progressed, she revisited this importance: “I think it was important for me to understand what some of those shifts [to instruction in
the CCSS] were going to be so that I can very carefully understand the capacity of the system.”

Assistant Superintendent Grace also referenced the importance Superintendent Hannah’s knowledge of the Common Core had for Hannah’s ability to assess school system capacity:

Our superintendent has a good understanding of the Common Core; I would say better than a lot of superintendents . . . I think if she didn’t have any idea about what was going on in the Common Core, that would not be good because she wouldn’t be able to support the ongoing work and understanding some of the angst and stress that goes along with it and how that can really be a normal part of change . . . I think [her understanding] definitely helped implementation.

Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn supported Grace’s assessment and identified that Superintendent Hannah’s comprehensive knowledge of the CCSS allowed her to identify the instructional practices needed for CCSS implementation:

I believe our superintendent does have a deep understanding of the Common Core. I know she works very closely with the administrative staff to hear what is going on and to listen to, especially, the struggles and the successes that we’re having as we implement it. I know that all relates to the Common Core itself and understanding it. I truly don’t know to what extend she under understands each of the different strands of the Common Core in literacy and math, but I do know what she understands is how rigorous it is and how in depth it is and the best practices and instruction that it takes to implement [the CCSS]. She is very aware of that.

Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria concurred, further noting:

Without her deep understanding of the Common Core and the instructional shifts that occur as a result of it, [implementation] probably wouldn’t work. You need a very solid, strong administration at the top in order to get something to get . . . [implementation to work like] . . . we’ve been able to accomplish.

**Superintendent understanding of the CCSS supported effective messaging about CCSS implementation to stakeholders.** Superintendent Hannah’s command of the
Common Core also was noted to support her work to communicate a vision for implementation. Hannah explained,

A big part of my job is to protect and promote and articulate what is most important—meaning when I am working with the Board of Education to develop District-wide goals I have to be really careful about the scope and specificity of those goals so that the breadth of what we’re working on isn’t beyond the capacity of the system.

Superintendent Hannah spoke of her leadership in this domain as transformational and instructionally focused. She suggested visioning was one of the most important leadership tasks for CCSS implementation:

Some of the most important things I believe in a superintendent’s position related to transformational leadership is getting really, really clear on a vision for the district. A vision that people believe in, a vision that people buy into—not just teacher teams, but administrative teams and the Board of Education as well.

Assistant Superintendent Grace echoed Superintendent Hannah’s comments, attributing much of Ericsson School District’s successful CCSS implementation to Hannah’s ability to communicate clearly with stakeholders about implementation. Grace suggested Superintendent Hannah did well to be “sure the Board of Education [was] crystal clear on the why behind the work.” She also noted that Hannah engaged with Ericsson stakeholders beyond the Board to articulate the purpose behind the Common Core.

Assistant Superintendent Grace shared that “her ability to articulate the why behind the Common Core implementation with stakeholders [was] key.”

**Superintendent providing/coordinating professional development/coaching.**

Data supported that providing and coordinating professional development and coaching was an important component to effective CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District. Assistant Superintendent Grace highlighted this importance:
Initial professional development was provided, but never [a] one and done kind of professional development. It’s always been . . . we’re going to come back to it over and over again through the coaches [and] through job embedded work. We haven’t had big speakers—except one—come and work with our consortium . . . It’s pretty much been internal, building the capacity of our coaches to lead a lot of [CCSS implementation] work.

Superintendent Hannah’s leadership in this domain centered on two important functions:

(a) working to expand and support the instructional coaching model and (b) supporting job-embedded professional development for staff responsible for implementing the CCSS.

**Expanding and supporting the instructional coaching model.** Middle School Assistant Principal Erik noted that the importance instructional coaching played in the effective implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District was somewhat accidental:

> You know . . . I’m not sure which is the horse and which is the cart; our coaches happen to be the facilitators of the job-alike areas, so those that are leading at the teacher level—the Common Core work—happen to be coaches. It would just kind of happen to be that they’re the right people.

District records indicate the instructional coaching team in Ericsson School District was comprised of 26 staff members during data collection for this study. Instructional coaches were listed as “teacher/instructional coach” in the district directory, but Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace explained that the role of the instructional coaches had begun to shift “from working with students to working with adults.” Instructional coaches in Ericsson School District supported teaching and learning in mathematics, literacy, information literacy, technology, and science by directly engaging with their teaching colleagues. They worked with them to design and
implement instructional programming for students and frequently functioned as facilitators for work to develop curricula aligned to the CCSS.

Middle School Assistant Principal Erik provided an assessment of the efficacy of the instructional coaches for effecting a positive implementation of the Common Core in Ericsson School District. He indicated,

They are instructional leaders; they are fairly expert at their craft. They are very strong at curriculum knowledge, very strong with instructional knowledge, very strong with assessment knowledge. The coaches just possessed a certain level of resource information [and] they connect well with the staff. It just worked well that they happen to be the individuals that were leading the content areas already and that’s sort of that next layer of leadership that we tapped into to develop the coaches.

Elementary Principal Rose supported Assistant Principal Erik’s assessment; she shared that the instructional coaching model has been significant. It’s been a significant factor in us being able to implement Common Core in ELA and math. The coaches spend a lot of time making sure that they understand it. They do a lot of research on their own as coaching teams and they do activities around Common Core and they’re able to bring that learning to classroom teachers who might not necessarily have time to do the background work that a coach would have allotted to his or her day. The evolution of our coaches becoming more and more proficient has dominoed to our teachers becoming more and more proficient.

Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn elaborated on the assessment of instructional coaching offered by Erik and Rose. She stated,

I think [instructional coaching] has been a really pivotal thing for making sure that [CCSS implementation happened] as seamlessly as it had. With the number of coaches—and we do have more coaches than other districts have but with the ability to focus our coaches on their specialty area and having enough in our building—we really have the capacity to help our teachers grow and to provide professional development with them to push them to their team meetings and help them delve deeply into the [CCSS] targets and look at the student data and figure out what they’re learning. It is hard to take on these new targets and our teachers are day-by-day; they are just overwhelmed at everything and understanding it.
Having the coaches in place there to start as resource providers . . . it relieves a lot of stress to have the coaches in place there to really help with that and bring some understanding and some foundation to them as they began the implementation.

Superintendent Hannah echoed comments shared by members of the Ericsson CCSS implementation team. She argued that instructional coaching expanded our capacity to support teachers and implementation . . . beyond district-level administrators and beyond principals, we have people whose full-time job is to meet with team, so sit down with grade-level teams, look at things that are coming up, help them access resources, help them with suggestions related to instructional strategies, push into the classrooms and co-teach and model. It’s their responsibility to really understand what’s coming up and to research their instructional strategies and resources around that. What [the instructional coaching model has] done is it’s expanded our capacity to support teachers in the implementation so I do think it has been critical.

Even though the efficacy of the coaching model was somewhat accidental, Superintendent Hannah’s leadership was important for the expansion of the instructional coaching model. Her main leadership effort that spurred expansion and continued support of the instructional coaching model was the facilitation of Board of Education and administrator articulation. Assistant Superintendent Grace commented, “Hannah has supported adding more coaches to our system. She worked with the Board of Education to make sure they supported that, so that’s a huge part of the leadership that has made [CCSS implementation] successful.”

Superintendent Hannah explained that the instructional coaching model expanded as the result of a meeting between district administrators and the Board:

Our greatest expansion was a year ago and it was the result . . . [of] every Board member and every administrator in the District com[ing] together for a full day to look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats—you know things happening in the system. The expansion of coaching came out of that collaborative retreat a year and a half ago when we were talking about the capacity of the system to implement and do all of this [CCSS implementation
work] well... The Board has been supportive of [expanding instructional coaching] because they recognized that we needed to build the capacity of the system.

Although the Ericsson Board of Education was supportive of the expansion of the instructional coaching model to support CCSS implementation, they requested more robust measures of the efficacy of the instructional coaching model. Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace explained, “The Board is extremely supportive of the expansion. What they’re asking for—and they should—is some kind of evidence of effectiveness of the coaching model. The Board is supportive, but it’s now asking for evidence of effectiveness.” Middle School Teacher and Literacy Coach Maria shared that efforts to quantify the efficacy of instructional coaching have centered on logging instructional coaching activities:

Currently we are in the process of now getting away from the anecdotal notes and saying, okay, how do we know that this coaching is really making a difference so that we can continue to show the Board what we’re doing is worth it. We’re keeping kind of a coaching log. We’re keeping a coaching log of kid of the day-to-day things that we do, but we’ve also recently given surveys out to teachers so we can kind of get some growth producing feedback to continue to improve our practices. Then we have been setting [Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely] (SMART) as well and meeting monthly on our own and weekly as a coaching group with administration in our buildings to make sure we’re working towards our goals so that we continue to provide the best service that we can for our teachers.

Providing professional development and instructional coaching. One of the benefits of instructional coaching noted to have positively influenced effective implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District was Superintendent Hannah’s support of timely, ongoing job-embedded professional development. Assistant
Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace indicated she felt quality implementation of the CCSS was really about a superintendent who believes professional development is important and supports high quality professional development [that is] job-embedded—which is what our coaches are doing. We have a professional learning team that really tries to live by the seven professional learning standards as identified by Learning Forward; Superintendent Hannah believes in those. Every action that she takes shows that she believes in supporting the work that we do everyday . . . I think that’s extremely important. She believes them and she understands what high quality professional development looks like; it’s not a one-shot deal.

Superintendent Hannah concurred. At the start of Ericsson School District’s CCSS implementation effort, she shared that she “supported a lot of national and local professional development” that could be brought back to the district. She referred to this approach as a “trainer’s model,” in which staff exposed to professional learning away from the district brought that learning back to others in the district. Superintendent Hannah reinforced the importance of this training occurring within the context of teachers’ work: “with the Common Core, we have had to do very strategic—we really kind of buckled down on job-embedded professional development and we have done releases specific to the work.”

Elementary Principal Rose agreed with Ericsson School District’s focus on job-embedded professional development when she noted that “we do a lot of our own professional development in-house.” Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria also referenced job-embedded professional development; she shared,

With the coaches, I think there’s some really powerful profession development that we have participated in with teachers and with ourselves . . . working together and being in the trenches. [This type of professional development is] not just handing teachers a set of the standards that says, you need to have these kids do [a] main topic. But, actually, being with the teachers, having conversations,
looking at work samples, pushing in model lessons, debriefing afterwards. [It is] meeting with the other coaches and saying, okay, this is how we’re looking at it, this is how you’re looking at it; let’s compare and contrast.

Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn also suggested job-embedded professional development was important to Ericsson’s effective implementation of the CCSS. She stated,

I think there has been a variety of professional development that’s been important. I think starting with just developing and understanding as teachers what the Common Core mean . . . I think a big piece of the professional development that has been going on with that is providing team their collaborative plan time in buildings and as a district, as well as increasing the instructional coaching model and putting coaches in place to help them develop that understanding and expertise and that professional development is embedded in their building and in their classrooms on a daily [and] weekly basis.

Kathryn noted that Superintendent Hannah’s leadership was important for job-embedded professional development related to implementation of the CCSS. She argued that “the superintendent was definitely involved in making that collaborative plan time happen and [with] making that embedded professional development at the coaches [level] happen.” Elementary Principal Rose supported Kathryn’s assessment of Superintendent Hannah’s leadership she stated,

Superintendent Hannah is working in tandem with Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace and Director of Curriculum and Assessment Garrett and getting a good understanding about what the district needs and then helping to outline where this professional development can occur. [She also has] input into how our days will look at various district-wide meetings on early release days . . . definitely she has an overarching effect into what we’re doing in professional development.

Superintendent Hannah’s leadership behaviors in support of CCSS implementation were far from directive. To the contrary, her leadership behaviors were characterized by supportive, guiding actions that involved multiple district stakeholders.
These leadership behaviors were further evident when examining data themes that supported the second research question from this study.

**Research Question #2: How Does a Distributed Approach to Leadership From the Superintendent Unite Stakeholder Visions for Implementation of the CCSS?**

The second research question examined how a distributed leadership approach from the superintendent united stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS. Data revealed four emergent themes relevant to this research question. These themes included facilitating collaboration, all district stakeholder’s learning together, the superintendent facilitating and monitoring goal setting, and the superintendent working to place staff in positions to best facilitate implementation of the CCSS. Once again, data collected through interviews, document analysis, and site observations are presented to support the identified themes.

**Collaboration.** As was previously established, Superintendent Hannah exercised leadership to support a variety of collaborative structures that can be conceptualized as teacher-driven collaboration, leadership support collaboration, and collaboration with actors outside of the Ericsson School District system. The distributed nature of Superintendent Hannah’s leadership that supported these collaborative structures emerged as an important theme for uniting stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS.

Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn reported that collaboration with a variety of stakeholders—particularly administration, teachers, and the Board of
Education—facilitated a shared understanding of a path forward for implementation of the CCSS. She explained,

Collaboration has helped create a realistic understanding of where we are in the implementation of the Common Core and where we need to go with implementation of the Common Core and what knowledge is lacking in different areas. Especially the collaboration among the administration . . . the teachers and the building coaches has developed a very clear understanding of where our system has gotten to, what our capacity is, and where we know that we need to go next; I definitely think that there is a shared vision of that.

Kathryn also noted that collaboration with the parent community was an important contributor to a shared vision for implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District:

We have a very involved parent community, and so the parent community feeling comfortable in approaching their teachers or their administration or even the Board of Education in saying and wanting clarity on wherever we’re going with [the CCSS] has created many opportunities for us to provide . . . informational nights or clarity or information to them on where were going with the implementation, what it looks like, our successes and our next steps.

Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria offered a similar assessment of the importance of collaboration for a unified vision of CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District:

I think collaboration has been really the key to why [CCSS implementation has] been so successful . . . no only collaboration among teachers of the same grade level, but also teachers of vertical grade levels. Then sharing that work that we’re doing with the Board so the School Board is privy to everything that is going on and is able to support us in anything that we need. As well as also parents—holding parental meetings because obviously with the Common Core there is a giant shift in instruction and the instructional focuses that are taking places in several of the courses so we hold monthly parent meetings to kind of give them information about what they should be expecting to see in their children’s classrooms, why it’s different, and how they can help to support their children at home.
Superintendent Hannah suggested that the greatest benefit of collaboration for a unified vision of CCSS implementation was related to the repeated messaging that occurred in these settings. She explained,

Collaborative structures really tightened up our communication tools related to the why behind the [implementation] work. For instance, administrators have the conversations about implementation and the directions we’re going and why. They go back and have those conversations with their team leaders. Those team leaders then have those conversations with their grade-level teams.

Superintendent Hannah also argued that having stakeholders involved in the work at each organizational level contributed to a shared vision for a CCSS implementation product. She continued,

Having those collaborative structures in place means that people are having conversations and hearing the same message multiple times in multiple collaborative groups. . . . Having those in place help us to tighten up the communication about vision, but our teacher are also [then] really deeply involved in all of the very specific work [related to implementation]. . . . The collaborative structures allow job-alike teams to unpack and power. It allows job-alike and grade-level teams to write assessments.

Superintendent Hannah argued that involving stakeholders in every step of the CCSS implementation process helped to unite stakeholder efforts and make it “clear what we’re doing and why.”

Site observations and document analysis confirmed stakeholders were involved in decision making and communicating related to CCSS implementation. During site observations, team leaders and coaches were noted to have relayed common communications related to CCSS implementation, and teacher teams were empowered to make decisions about the implementation process. Further, documents collected demonstrated evidence of significant collaboration between teachers and leaders in
Ericsson School District. Digital collaborative documents housed in Google Apps for Education allowed staff to collaborate on powering and pacing of the standards, curriculum guides, and common assessments.

**All stakeholders learning together.** As Ericsson School District educators approached the task of implementing the CCSS, it quickly became apparent to Superintendent Hannah that she and other district leaders would have difficulty keeping one step ahead of staff responsible for implementing the standards in the classroom. She indicated, “There have been many times, and there will continue to be, during this implementation, where we really from a leadership perspective are barely staying one step ahead of our teachers.” Hannah argued that because leadership had such a difficult time keeping informed about the CCSS, Ericsson administrators had to recognize that they would need learn about the CCSS with stakeholders. Hannah stated, “We have to be willing to say, you know what, that’s a great question. We don’t know that we have the best answer. Let’s go out and learn together and figure it out.”

Superintendent Hannah suggested that fostering a leadership approach that valued learning together was distributed in nature. She stated,

> What we really try to do related to distributed leadership is, number one, we learn together. We make sure that we are a learning group and that our time together isn’t spent primarily on sharing information and talking about tasks, but really more, you know, if we’re leading this work . . .we need to be able to answer deeply the questions that our faculty and staff have.

As a leadership team, Superintendent Hannah argued that they needed to restructure the focus of their meeting time together. She stated, “I think that one of the things that has to be in place related to learning together is you have to work on a cultural shift around how
[you spend] your time together.” Hannah argued that the focus of time spent meeting and working across the district needed to be focused on learning rather than administrative and managerial tasks. Using the Ericsson leadership team as an example, Superintendent Hannah explained,

We had to shift our agreements about how we were going to spend our time and how we were going to do things like distribute information and do memos, those kinds of things, how we were going to do those outside of spending the vast majority of our time together doing that. It’s a really important ingredient to have in place, but as far as leadership goes, I think that you have to make sure that learning together remains a priority because there’s so much that’s going on.

Superintendent Hannah’s efforts to foster a distributed leadership approach for learning together was bolstered by her specific focus on modeling strategies for facilitating meetings across the district. She shared,

We’re doing strategies called “making meetings matter” and we go through all of the strategies at our admin meetings. We do the strategies; we participate in the strategies, but it’s giving people a lot of tools to use with their staff and their teams around certain conversations, around certain tasks that they have to do, around leadership when it comes to making your time together matter. We’re focusing on growing administrators that way because then our administrators are using them those same tools when they do our periodic trainings of our team leaders and job-alike facilitators.

Site observation data confirmed the existence of a distributed structure for professional learning and decision making related to CCSS implementation. During observations of teacher teams working to plan for CCSS aligned instruction, it was frequently noted that teachers were discussing and reflecting on the CCSS in small groups settings. These meetings were facilitated by teachers or coaches functioning in a formal leadership capacity on the team. Teachers were observed negotiating meaning of the CCSS, identifying resources to support instruction, collaboratively developing benchmark
assessments to measure student learning against the standards, and modifying instructional plans based on their understanding of how students received CCSS aligned instruction in the classroom.

**Goal setting.** Goal setting for implementation of the CCSS emerged as a distributed process that fostered a united vision for implementation of the CCSS. Elementary Principal Rose commented, “We work really hard to give everybody a voice in goal setting.” Assistant Principal Erik also noted that “everyone” was involved with district goal setting related to CCSS implementation. Superintendent Hannah concurred with Rose and Erik; she noted a very purposeful process for setting goals related to implementation of the CCSS that was inclusive of all district stakeholders.

**Importance of goal setting for CCSS implementation.** Superintendent Hannah suggested goal setting was essential to successful implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District. She stated,

> My most important focus related to my vision was that with an implementation plan, that we implement [the CCSS] with fidelity. And, as we started to set goals around [implementation], in order to do it well and in order to do it with fidelity, it became really clear that we could not have goals that just centered on global implementation of the new standards.

Hannah also reported that she recognized that goals for implementation of the CCSS needed to be more nuanced and recognize the necessary supports teachers and others would need to effectively implement the standards in the classroom:

> We also had to have supporting goals vision-wise that provided for clarity, that provided a high level of support and also provided and focused on the resources we were going to need to get it done. So, for instance, when I talk about doing it well and implementing [CCSS] with fidelity, that means that along with implementing the new standards, we had to also make sure that we were considering and adopting goals around the instruction—the shift in instructional
practices that we going to have to happen in order for [the CCSS] to be implemented well.

Responding to this recognized need, Superintendent Hannah facilitated a goal-setting process that purposefully incorporated feedback from multiple stakeholders in the Ericsson school system.

**Distributed goal-setting process.** The goal-setting process for CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District started in February of each year. Superintendent Hannah explained,

> Every year since the Common Core was released, in our goal setting process, it begins with, essentially in February, I go out as superintendent and I meet face-to-face with every single teacher in our district. . . . Those conversations focus around the work, what are the experiences, what are your current frustrations, what went well, what makes sense related to next steps related to these goals.

Hannah shared that she and the administrative leadership team members reflect on her conversations with Ericsson teachers and draft initial goal language and timelines to support CCSS implementation, but the goals drafted at this point are far from final.

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace remarked on Hannah’s focus on gathering feedback from district stakeholders; she shared,

> [Superintendent Hannah] obviously makes the final decision about the goals and how we are going to work to achieve those goals, but before she does she asks for input from all of the schools, from the administrators, from the school board. I think it’s a . . . even though she ultimately comes up with the final goals, I think that everybody has input so that they also feel ownership of those goals so that they didn’t just come out of left field, but that they’ve has a part in kind of hand picking where are the areas that we need to grow and how can we go about making sure that we continue to provide the best instruction to all kids.
To gather additional feedback on the initial draft of implementation goals, Assistant Superintendent Grace remarked that goals are shared with job-alike facilitators and team leaders. Superintendent Hannah added,

> We take that draft language, coaches spend time in their job-alikes look at it and developing feedback as does every content team at every grade level. They get potential draft goal areas in language and they create feedback. Then that comes back to the full administrative counsel, principals, and we take a look at all of that feedback, we read through it, we more deeply refine and talk about some decisions we need to make about what we’ll do and not do.

Efforts to incorporate staff feedback did not end after the administrative team’s review. In addition, goal setting is a primary focus of a retreat facilitated by Superintendent Hannah at the end of each school year. According to Assistant Superintendent Grace, the retreat functions as a celebration of the year, but also [as] a reflection on the year. That’s where we’ll have stakeholders from each building, teacher stakeholders from each building attend and talk through the successes over the years, some of the challenges, and then look at the goals for the upcoming year and provide another round of feedback.

Superintendent Hannah described the retreat participants as having included all district-level administrators, principals, and seven or eight staff members selected by principals from each of the Ericsson school buildings. Participants provided feedback on draft goals and, according to Superintendent Hannah, worked to “map out and plan” work to be done in staff meetings and job-alike meetings to support the goals.

When the retreat was completed, Superintendent Hannah reported that she worked to “draft final goals, recommendations for the Board of Education, present them in July, [and they are] adopted in August.” However, Hannah was quick to mention that the goal setting process was far from complete at this point. Modes of accountability are
considered and Superintendent Hannah reported making adjustments to district goals if needed in response to feedback from stakeholders.

**Goal accountability.** Elementary Principal Rose reported that goals related to implementation of the CCSS are revisited frequently throughout the school year. She shared,

> We revisit the goals frequently; we check in. We check our progress, monitor it, see how we’re doing with those and then we reevaluate do we need to tweak the goal, do we need to adjust any [professional development] to make this goal happen? It’s a relatively frequent check in on these goals. I would say with each trimester we’re checking on the goals to see how we’re doing.

Assistant Principal Erik echoed Rose’s comments about checking in with staff on goals. He referenced soliciting and receiving feedback from teachers and job-alike facilitators as providing important information that informed the administrative team as to how the district was making progress toward CCSS implementation goals. He stated that he thought the “accountability piece comes from the feedback from teachers.” He indicated that “administrators reach out to our team leaders to find out what’s plausible, what’s realistic, and if one particular content area needed a little bit more on something.”

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace reported the solicitation of similar feedback. She shared,

> We also talk about our goals at pretty much every other meeting that we have as an administrative team. Sometimes it’s one goal, not all the goals, but certain goals are brought up throughout the year. We’ve also in the past had an agenda item, or an agenda section that identifies our discussion and how they relate to each goal, and various other pieces of evidence that we’ll pull together to determine if we’re making progress toward the goal.

Grace referenced frequent solicitation of feedback on progress toward goals in relation to a formal mid-year check in with the Ericsson Board of Education. Superintendent
Hannah reported that she is responsible for facilitating the report and ensures that information and artifacts from each of Ericsson’s school buildings are presented to the Board.

Even though the report to the Board is formal in nature, the report and other modes of goal accountability seemed not to function in a high-stakes manner. Superintendent Hannah reported that frequent feedback on progress toward goals was needed to understand what the school system needed. She was careful to mention that goals related to CCSS implementation were not rigid:

There have been occasions where we have adopted a one-year goal and going into the next year we will revise that. . . . We don’t believe in setting a hard and fast goal and then being inflexible. . . . if we learn something that we didn’t know before we started implementation.

**Superintendent positioning staff correctly.** A third theme that emerged to support how a distributed leadership approach from Superintendent Hannah positively influenced CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District centered on Hannah’s efforts to position staff optimally for the implementation effort. Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace suggested that she believed this effort started at the top; she shared,

I really believe that the key to a strong implementation has to start from that top level; then you have to have people in the trenches who are support the work, leading the work, expecting implementation like the principals and the assistant principals and then supporting the work like the coaches. I think that’s why we’ve been successful; we have all of those components and that is because Superintendent Hannah made sure all those [people] are in place.

Interview data revealed that Superintendent Hannah’s efforts to position staff for the implementation effort focused on two key areas: hiring and leadership.
**Hiring.** Superintendent Hannah was responsible for overseeing several key staffing changes on the Ericsson administrative team that functioned to improve collaboration and commitment to the CCSS implementation vision. Elementary Principal Rose shared that Hannah had “worked very hard to get the right people at the right seats at [the] district office level.” Superintendent Hannah indicated additional changes occurred at the building level. She explained, “We had a couple principals come and go related to being committed to the vision that we have related to implementations and what we’re committed to and what we’re not—what we think is important and what we don’t.”

In addition to facilitating administrative changes, Superintendent Hannah has overseen a mind shift in hiring practices related to teaching and coaching staff. Assistant Superintendent Grace suggested that when hiring, the district is “definitely asking what [candidates’] familiarity is with the Common Core.” In addition, Grace explained that the ability to lead from within the teaching and coaching ranks was an important trait Ericsson School District was seeking in new hires. She reported that selection of staff is not really about implementation of the Core as much as it is about that person having the personality traits, sometimes, and the ability to be able to lead change and lead . . . that’s what Common Core really is. . . . We want to make sure we have the right people on the bus.

Elementary Principal Rose attributed more rigorous hiring practices to Superintendent Hannah. She stated, “We work really, really hard to make sure we [have] quality people in spots and I can happily say we don’t stop interviewing until we’re confident that that’s the right person.”
Superintendent Hannah extended the focus on hiring practices to include an intense focus on mentoring new teachers and more rigorous standards for granting teacher tenure. She shared,

Our teacher evaluation, we have changed drastically over the last five years with what we do in those first four years. We have a more rigorous two year mentoring program, but I have to say if we don’t feel really good about somebody after we’ve put a couple years of development into them, we’re not tenuring people. That’s a big shift; five, six, seven, eight years ago it was very rare to release one unless there were really significant concerns and we are much more discriminating about who we keep in tenure.

Leadership. Assistant Superintendent Grace’s assertion that Ericsson have the “right people on the bus” was not limited to the hiring of new staff. Superintendent Hannah’s leadership was credited for tasking staff members with expertise in areas pertinent to CCSS implementation. Superintendent Hannah pointed to the selection of team leaders as evidence of her leadership in this domain. She shared,

When we began the Common Core implementation, we had an antiquated process related to the selection of team leaders and we had an antiquated description of what team leaders do. Team leaders were essentially, I go to the team leader meeting, I get information and I share that information with my team. That might be, that’s going to be delivered, I had an alternate bell schedule, those kinds of things. We revamped the job description of team leaders to include much more leadership than ownership for the vision and the implementation of goals beyond dissemination of information. Once we did that, that necessitated pretty significant rotation in who sat on leadership teams at the building.

In addition to team leaders, Superintendent Hannah referenced moving staff at the coaching level to provide the necessary leadership for CCSS implementation. She stated that throughout the district she needed to make sure that we have the appropriate people in a position so that the coach would truly be a support and resource through implementation . . . we have had to move some people in and out of coaching positions to make sure we were providing the high level of support that we intended to.
Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn supported Superintendent Hannah’s assessment of personnel moves to support leadership for CCSS implementation. She explained, “I can speak definitely from the elementary level. I know there has been a lot of really conscious thought on who—especially with our instructional coaches, who are going to be the right kind of instructional coaches according to [the school].” Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria shared Kathryn’s assessment and added that consideration has also been given to relationships throughout the system. She shared that when selecting instructional coaches, the district worked to pick “people that are good relationship builders because even if you have all the knowledge in the world, you’re not going to be able to get people to change or grow unless you are able to kind of have a good relationship.”

Superintendent Hannah’s efforts to position staff correctly stemmed from her desire to promote leadership for CCSS implementation from within the school system. Assistant Principal Erik noted that these efforts also touched on which administrators were tasked to lead portions of the implementation effort. He explained,

“I think that our superintendent has a really good pulse on what her leaders strengths and areas of growth are, and she definitely positions the strengths where they’re needed. As a simple example, if one of the administrative leaders has somewhat of a level of content awareness, say in math for example . . . [that administrator] has that street cred that maybe the job-alike group needs to have.

Wherever Superintendent Hannah worked to position staff members, Assistant Superintendent Grace highlighted the distributed nature of the leadership effort Hannah’s positioning of staff encouraged. Grace stated, “[Superintendent Hannah] trusts us. She
trusts us to do . . . she feels like she has the right people and she trusts us that we’re doing the right work.”

Research Question #3: What Challenges Did the Superintendent Face When Working to Unite Stakeholder Visions of Curricula With the CCSS?

The final research question focused on the challenges Superintendent Hannah faced as she worked to unite stakeholder visions for CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District. Data revealed challenges related to district communication about CCSS implementation, professional development needs for staff, and teacher stress and burnout. Data from interviews and site observations support a description of the challenges the superintendent faced and her efforts to overcome the identified obstacles to CCSS implementation.

Superintendent communication/messaging. While the implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District was widely regarded as successful, it was not without challenges. Challenges reported by interview participants generally conformed to two categories. The first category focused on the need to educate parents regarding the shifts associated with teaching to the CCSS. The second category explored concerns shared by staff regarding the speed of implementation and the paucity of resources for their work with students. In both instances, communication and messaging from the superintendent emerged as an important behavior to assist Ericsson stakeholders to be able to move forward with implementation while operating with a unified vision.

The need to educate Ericsson parents about shifts associated with the CCSS. Interview participants reported that the Ericsson parent community had, at times, required
specific communications to understand shifts in teaching and learning associated with implementation of the CCSS. However, the need for this communication was not related directly to resistance from the community. Superintendent Hannah reported that “knock on wood, we haven’t had a whole lot of push back about the Common Core and whether to implement it or not. We haven’t had a lot of that in the community.” Even so, interview respondents seemed aware that there was more global resistance to the CCSS outside of the Ericsson School District community. Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria reported her awareness of an “undercurrent out there on Twitter and Facebook where there’s a lot of Common Core bashing going on.” She shared that she felt there was a need to give “people the right information and [let] them know what the Common Core standards actually are.” Superintendent Hannah concurred with this assessment and reported that she had worked to lead the district “to be pretty proactive on communicating about the Common Core, what it is, and what it isn’t, and to highlight the ways we think it’s better for our students in preparing them.”

Superintendent Hannah spearheaded the bulk of the proactive communication efforts in the Ericsson School District community. Communication efforts included publishing blog posts, superintendent messages to the community, and informational nights open to the Ericsson parent community. Superintendent Hannah explained,

Last year we did a series of parent evenings around Common Core—where it came from. I write about it in my superintendent messages. . . . Last year was a real targeted year for that. Here’s what the Common Core is; here’s where it came from; here is the focus; here is the shift in practice that you’ll start to see as a parent.
Superintendent Hannah provided an example of why she felt such communications were necessary, using CCSS mathematics as an illustration:

[For parents] it’s difficult because kids even at a very early age are learning math very differently than we learned math, so parents have a hard time helping their kids something at home with their homework. We instituted a series of math nights for elementary parents that have been extremely well attended—anywhere from 50 to 120 parents have attended each of those. We did them in grade-level bands.

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace affirmed the importance of Superintendent Hannah’s communications with the Ericsson parent community. She shared that Hannah’s communications speak “to the importance of the Common Core and . . . while it is a change . . . that causes stress and angst . . . [Superintendent Hannah communicates] that it’s the right thing for kids.” Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn also supported the importance of Hannah’s communications with the Ericsson parent community. She stated,

There have definitely been communications from her to the parents within the district community at large that has played a role in just developing understanding of what the Common Core is, why it’s important, why we’re implementing it, why different things in the district have changed. . . . The weekly messages from the superintendent, just what is the purpose behind the Common Core, being really clear on how we are implementing it, what impact that has on our students and our instruction—all [of those types of communications] has been important for . . . our parents [to] understand where we’re going with [teaching and learning].

Regardless of the mode of communication, Superintendent Hannah reported that a key to successful communication about the CCSS implementation effort in Ericsson School District was “to repeat [communications] with boorish redundancy.” She stressed that messaging about the CCSS implementation effort needed to be sustained; for a
message to take root in the community Hannah argued she and her team “can’t just put it out their once.”

_Ericsson staff concerns about speed of implementation and a paucity of resources_. As the CCSS implementation effort made progress in Ericsson School District, two distinct challenges emerged from the staff. The first challenge referenced fatigue and burn out related to the speed of implementation. The second focused on growing frustration with the absence of well-aligned resources related to the CCSS. Superintendent Hannah noted that staff, when fatigued in the latter portion of the school year, are at times asking “Why are we doing this? Why did we decide to do this?” She argued that, “strictly from a teacher perspective, the pushback hasn’t been around implementing the Common Core. The pushback has been around their frustration that there aren’t more readily available perfectly aligned resources.” She also shared that “some of the pushback from a teacher perspective has come around the amount of time that [implementation is] taking because we’re using pieces of different resources and that has been a real challenge.”

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace agreed with Superintendent Hannah’s assessment of staff concerns related to implementation of the CCSS. She shared, probably the biggest [challenge] is, again, the resource issue. Some teachers in our system just want some textbook to walk them through the entire process . . . I think the other [challenge] is that their level of familiarity with what the Common Core is actually asking is they’re still trying to understand some of the standards and what they actually mean . . . It [is] the whole change piece that I was really good at my job before I had to do all these thing that now I’m being asked to do. So, I feel like I’m not as successful as a teacher anymore. I think that has caused
resistance because it’s just [a] comfort level with what’s happening with the change.

Unlike with the parent group, Grace noted that Superintendent Hannah did not push messages to help alleviate staff concerns. Rather, her communication strategy centered on actively listening to staff concerns about CCSS implementation. Grace noted that Hannah “goes to each building several times a year to basically just have conversations with staff related to some of the challenges they’re facing.”

Superintendent Hannah’s active listening strategy was also noted by Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn:

The superintendent, not so much send out messages, but having it be very clear that she is open to hearing from staff and hearing from administrators on how things are going, and being very open and willing to have conversations around why we’re doing the things that we do or what [the] thought process was to make different decisions and just being open and available for that kind of communication. Those are all pieces that have been important in [the CCSS] implementation.

Assistant Principal Erik concurred with Grace and Kathryn; he shared that he felt “she’s got a strong finger on the pulse of the system and she does have a pretty good understanding overall as to what’s going on.”

Assistant Principal Erik and Assistant Superintendent Grace commented that Superintendent Hannah’s listening strategy informed the Ericsson administrative team’s efforts to support CCSS implementation. Grace commented that following conversations with staff, Superintendent Hannah will come back and communicate that with us, the administrative team or the district office team usually first, and talk about some of the things that people are feeling and so then that mobilizes me and the coaches to figure out how to support those teams as they go through that. When we hear it’s a resource issue—they’re really stressed about that—they we figure out what we need to do to maybe give them
more support related to resources. It’s great, because it starts at [Superintendent Hannah’s] level, they’re being heard, she’s coming to us and then we’re kicking in resources or kicking in support so that people feel like what they told her is actually making a difference because we’re able to get that information and do what we need to do.

Assistant Principal Erik noted that Superintendent Hannah’s listening strategy also resulted in her approval of modified timelines and expectations related to CCSS implementation:

She does make some adjustment[s] . . . Just being responsive to that level of stress from the math group at the middle school level led her to make a change in her timeline that she had shared with the School Board . . . She pulled back on [the] standards-based report car expectations for math for this one calendar year with the expectation that they’d have one year of implementation of Common Core under their belt.

Superintendent Hannah confirmed this was a purposeful effort on her part:

Those kind of listening pieces and feedback loops that I’ve tried to building in, I have also, on more than one occasion, altered our recommendations for timeline. Okay this is too much,. This was supposed to be a one-year goal; we’re going to make it a two-year goal because it’s not feasible. We’ve tried really carefully to weigh all of the feedback and make adjustments where appropriate.

In both instances—pushing communication to parents and modeling active listening with staff—Superintendent Hannah was able to ensure Ericsson moved forward with a united CCSS implementation effort. Parents remained informed and were able to stay onboard with the initiative while staff influenced the implementation timeline and result in ways that respected their own experiences in the classroom.

**Professional development/coaching.** One of the often noted challenges associated with implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District was the need to educate staff about the standards. Superintendent Hannah reported that she “supported a lot of national and local professional development” for staff with the goal of fostering an
environment where staff share their learning with one another. Superintendent Hannah and other members of her CCSS implementation leadership team suggested this approach to professional development contributed to the development of a unified vision for CCSS implementation. Superintendent Hannah stated,

> We’re real committed to professional development and we’ve done a tremendous amount of additional pullout days for professional development . . . [Professional development is] really the only thing that got us to consensus and it started with learning and then moved into action—deeply understanding [the CCSS] and then aligning, pacing, [and doing] assessment writing [together]. It has been key.

Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria shared that professional development was “huge” for developing a unified vision for implementation of the CCSS. She reported,

> I think even before we started unpacking and powering he standards two years ago, we were going to all of the professional development opportunities that were available in the area . . . Just sending people, I think sending people places and the right people ahead of time so that we have the knowledge so that we can bring it back and make it feel less like, “Oh, we’re just going to take this giant leap,” but we’ve researched it and we kind of have a plan in place so I think that’s been key.

Assistant Principal Erik also suggested professional development was integral for promoting a unified vision for CCSS implementation; he shared that it promoted shared understandings between staff members:

> [Professional development in Ericsson School District] is something so structured that if teachers are going to someplace, or they’re just learning from each other on such a regular basis that through their understandings—and through their conversations with each other at that teacher level—they’re building their awareness and they’re building that consensus as to what works and what doesn’t work [for implementation].

Elementary Principal Rose summed up the importance professional development played for facilitating a unified vision for implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School
District in a short statement. She shared that professional development fostered a unified implementation vision “through building understanding.” She argued that she felt “it’s as simple as that. Building understanding of why we’re doing this [and] the importance of doing this. It is a help to get people onboard.”

Superintendent identifies and relieves stress in system. Interview participants frequently referenced the stress the implementation of the CCSS placed on the Ericsson school system. The indicated stress was most frequently manifested in teacher stress and burnout. Assistant Principal Erik shared, “I think we’ve all seen this with the teachers that at some point every teacher has kind of come to a stress point where they’ve . . . broken down . . . managing the stress or the challenge.” Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn referenced teachers feeling overwhelmed by CCSS implementation work. She shared, “There’s a lot of stress and it’s overwhelming . . . there’s time when we said, you know, we need more time just as teachers together to talk about what on earth does this mean?” Elementary Principal Rose attributed teacher stress and fatigue to the different demands the CCSS place on implementing teachers. She indicated, “[teachers] sometimes talk about the Common Core . . . like it’s rocked their world . . . They’ve been taught a certain way and they’ve been teaching the way they were taught and it’s just a huge change for them.”

Superintendent Hannah reported that she was well aware of the stressors related to CCSS implementation present in the Ericsson system. However, she noted that efforts to relieve stressors in the system were imperfect. She shared, “I will be the first one to note
that although I may be aware of all the stressors, they’re still there. We can’t alleviate all
the stressors. Change is change and that’s going to be stressful.”

Even though Hannah recognized she could not hope to alleviate all stressors, she
did describe engaging in two leadership behaviors that were noted to provide some relief
in the Ericsson system. These behaviors included enacting feedback loops and engaging
in relationship building.

**Feedback loops.** Superintendent Hannah articulated the importance of being
deliberate about ensuring feedback loops were present in the Ericsson school system. She
stated, “[Teachers] need a way to provide . . . feedback. They need places in their
agendas like the job-alike agenda to have the opportunity to give real time feedback
related to [CCSS implementation].” Hannah argued that feedback loops offered an
opportunity for teachers to create opportunities to reflect as a system:

Part of the way you relieve stress is to just make sure that you have loops in place
where people feel like they have opportunities to give feedback related to what
the next steps might be. When you get into January and February there are very
few people that remember that they actually had feedback [and] that they gave
feedback and had a [part in the] process. We go back to that and we talk about it.

Feedback received from teaching staff was put to use to modify timelines or
supports necessary for smooth implementation of the CCSS. Assistant Principal Erik
reported he observed that Superintendent Hannah “stepped into certain job-alike groups
that she knew . . . were stressed out.” Erik reported that Hannah provided positive
feedback and “adjusted timelines” to reduce the stress the group was experiencing.
Similarly, Elementary Principal Rose indicated she had observed Superintendent Hannah
alleviate stress “through providing time.” Rose shared that Hannah worked closely with
administrative leaders to recognize teachers’ needs related to time and resources needed for CCSS implementation and would work collaboratively with building administrators to provide necessary supports to teachers.

Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning Grace also took notice of Superintendent Hannah’s efforts to solicit feedback from teachers. She shared that Superintendent Hannah worked to get “the pulse of the system through the Ericsson union.” In addition, Hannah worked with a group called the Professional Learning Team (PLT), as Grace noted:

The other piece is our professional learning team. We call it our PLT. Those are representatives from each building who come together once a month and talk about, how is implementation going? How is everybody feeling? What do we need to do? For instance, one of the things that the PLT communicated to us is teams just need more time together. . . . After conversations with Superintendent Hannah and principals, we decided to make the change based on the feedback we heard.

Assistant Superintendent Grace reported that staff felt supported and listened to and, as a result, the culture for CCSS implementation was strengthened.

**Relationships.** Beyond official structures for soliciting feedback, Superintendent Hannah reported that the relationships she forged with staff members provided her an opportunity to hear about how the CCSS implementation effort was progressing and what stressors existed in the system. She explained, “I have relationships with people so that when there are stressors and things that are frustrating, they feel comfortable sharing those with me, even just on an informal basis so that I’m aware of those.” Hannah argued that these informal opportunities provided staff an “opportunity for their voices to be heard, but they also [provided an] opportunity to celebrate the things that have gone well
in trying to maintain and further to develop trust so that people can share those things with me more informally.”

Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn affirmed Superintendent Hannah’s claim regarding soliciting feedback informally through relationships she had built:

Superintendent Hannah is just present in our building all the time. She visits classrooms. She pops in. She’s constantly meeting in the building, stopping by our staff development. She, more so than I have ever seen in another district is open and available for speaking with staff. And, she knows the staff; she knows us by name.

Kathryn suggested that Superintendent Hannah’s presence in the buildings “gives her a very hands on understanding of the stress in the system and just being open and available and listening as we talk and we share concerns or successes is helpful to the staff.”

Elementary Principal Rose and Middle School Literacy Coach and Teacher Maria reported similar observations of Superintendent Hannah’s work to engage in informal settings with staff. In a similar observation to the one Kathryn made, Rose reported that “Superintendent Hannah is out and about frequently.” Maria shared that Superintendent Hannah also worked to sponsor a climate and culture luncheon:

[Superintendent Hannah] also does a climate and culture luncheon which will be happening next week where each of the grade levels will get to come in and eat their lunch and just kind of have an informal discussion about what’s going well [and] what they think can be improved upon.

Additionally, Rose and Maria shared that Superintendent Hannah adopts several classrooms each school year. Maria explained,

So what she’ll do is she’ll come into . . . it’s kind of fun. It’s a lottery system on the first day do you can put your name in and then she’ll do a drawing and whoever wins the drawing will get the opportunity to work with the
superintendent. She’ll come in . . . and just kind of see what’s going on, on a daily basis in a teacher’s classroom.

Elementary Principal Rose commented that sponsoring a classroom provided Superintendent Hannah another forum for a casual conversation. She shared,

I think she has two adopt-a-classrooms in two different schools this year. She’s out, she’s talking to people. She’s very good at just creating the forum of having a casual conversation and through those casual conversations it’s just a very large information gather session so she gets a lot of take-aways from those talks with teachers.

Summary

This chapter shared findings related to one school district superintendent’s efforts to lead implementation of the CCSS in her school district. Before data collection for this study, scholarship had yet to investigate the superintendent’s leadership in this context. This study was informed by a theoretical framework that posited purposeful distributed leadership for learning from the superintendent (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Elmore, 2002; Gronn, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2006; Murphy, Elliot, & Goldring, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) is supportive of effective CCSS implementation. Findings indicated that the superintendent facilitated and engaged in several behaviors that positively influenced the implementation effort in Ericsson School District. These behaviors included fostering collaboration, assessing the school district’s capacity for implementation, providing/coordinating professional development/coaching, encouraging all stakeholders to learn together, facilitating and monitoring goal setting, placing staff in the correct positions for implementation, communicating/messaging with stakeholders regarding the implementation effort, and working to relieve teacher stress.
Chapter 5
Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of this research study, including a review of the research methodology and major findings. The discussion section expands on the results of the research findings and provides insights for practitioners and scholars regarding possible implications. Additionally, this final chapter concludes with recommendations for practice, policy, and future research in the area of superintendent leadership for policy implementation and student learning.

Overview of Research Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how one Illinois school district superintendent effectively led implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The conceptual framework for this study was based on three theoretical frameworks: policy implementation theory, distributed leadership, and leadership for learning. Policy implementation theory offers a construct by which the relationships between policies, policy actors, and the context within which implementation occurs can be explored and their influence on the implementation result understood (Honig, 2006). Distributed leadership provides a supportive leadership paradigm whereby school leadership is not conceptualized as the work of one person; rather, distributed leadership posits that school leadership is comprised of multiple actors...
working in a synergistic, concertive fashion toward the implementation result (Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2008; Spillane, 2005, 2006). Leadership for learning accounts for the focus of a leader’s efforts; in the context of this study, it accounts for the superintendent’s steadfast focus on the core function of schooling—teaching and learning (Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2007).

Using a conceptual framework based on tenets of these theoretical frameworks, this study investigated the following three research questions:

1. In what behaviors and activities does an effective superintendent engage when leading the implementation of the CCSS?

2. How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?

3. What challenges did the superintendent face when working to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?

The methodology for this study involved a case study of one Illinois school district superintendent as she worked to lead implementation of the CCSS in her school district. Superintendent Hannah served as the superintendent of Ericsson School District—a medium-sized K-8 school district in the greater Chicagoland area. Data were collected primarily through interviews with the superintendent and members of the Ericsson School District team responsible for implementing the CCSS. Additional data included approximately nine hours of site observations of CCSS-related implementation work, and review of a variety of district documents related to CCSS implementation.
Findings

The findings that stemmed from this study are included in this section. Findings are reported in relation to each of the three research questions.

**Research Question #1: In what behaviors and activities does an effective superintendent engage when leading the implementation of the CCSS?** The superintendent engaged in four primary behaviors that supported effective CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District. Behaviors included facilitating collaboration, assessing the school district’s capacity for implementation, evidencing a developed understanding of the CCSS, and providing/coordinating professional development and instructional coaching.

Interview data consistently referenced the importance of collaboration for effective CCSS implementation in the district, and the superintendent was credited with facilitating much of the collaboration that occurred to support implementation. Collaborative structures were noted to conform to one of three overarching categories for collaboration: teacher-driven collaboration, leadership support collaboration, and collaboration with actors outside of the Ericsson school system. Although the superintendent was directly responsible for initiating collaboration with actors outside of the Ericsson system as well as developing a collaborative structure for administrative team members, she was not credited with prompting the development of the majority of the collaborative structures that supported CCSS implementation. Even so, interview participants endorsed her leadership as a key factor in the success of these structures. They suggested the supportive leadership behaviors the superintendent evidenced
included the following: keeping the vision for collaboration, supporting and protecting time for collaboration, and providing leadership development and support for teachers assuming the role of team leader or job-alike facilitator. The efficacy of collaboration for CCSS implementation was further illuminated by site observation data and document review. Teachers were observed collaborating for CCSS implementation with instructional coaches and teachers successfully demonstrating leadership for implementation. Documents also exhibited evidence of collaboration; numerous digital documents were collected that showed teachers collaborating in grade and content areas as well as across grade levels.

The superintendent’s work to assess the capacity of the district to implement the CCSS also emerged as a significant leadership behavior that influenced a positive implementation result. Superintendent Hannah engaged in several activities to inform her understanding of school system capacity for implementation, including engaging in frequent meetings with administrators, conversing with teachers one-on-one and in small-group settings, and directly embedding herself in classroom settings to observe CCSS aligned instruction. Interview data corroborated the importance of ongoing dialogue among the superintendent and CCSS implementing staff members. Additionally, the superintendent worked with the administrative team to complete a robust review of student achievement data to determine relative strengths and weaknesses present in the system that were related to the efficacy of the CCSS implementation effort.

In addition to fostering collaboration and working to assess the school system’s capacity, the superintendent’s work to develop a complete understanding of the CCSS
emerged as a significant leadership behavior. Interview respondents suggested that the district’s successful CCSS implementation would not have been possible without a superintendent who possessed a comprehensive knowledge of the CCSS. This knowledge helped inform her understanding of what was working well, what was not, as well as to recognize what staff needed to support implementation. Additionally, the superintendent’s understanding was identified as an important contributor to the superintendent’s ability to communicate a vision for CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District. Interviews emphasized the importance the superintendent played in communicating a very clear vision for implementation that communicated a vision that people believed in and that was inclusive of all stakeholders.

One final leadership behavior from the superintendent that emerged as an important contributor to effective implementation of the CCSS included her work to provide and facilitate professional development and coaching. The superintendent’s role in this domain centered on two important functions: working to expand and support the instructional coaching model and supporting job-embedded professional development for staff responsible for implementing the CCSS. The instructional coaching model in Ericsson School District was robust, with an instructional coaching team comprised of 26 staff members with responsibilities in mathematics, literacy, information literacy, technology, and science. Although the coaching model was present before the superintendent began her tenure, her leadership was credited with expanding and refining the model to support CCSS implementation. Moreover, the superintendent’s leadership was referenced as important for ongoing professional development provided to teachers.
who were responsible for implementing the CCSS. The superintendent was credited with support of national and local professional development that contributed positively to implementation, but her biggest contribution was related to her work to support ongoing job-embedded professional development. The superintendent worked with the Board of Education to expand instructional coaching and to provide and protect time necessary for teachers to work together to better understand and plan for implementing the CCSS.

**Research Question #2: How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?**

The superintendent exercised a leadership strategy that was distributed in nature. Four emergent themes were supportive of this strategy: the superintendent facilitating collaboration, engaging all stakeholder’s to learn together, facilitating and monitoring goal setting for CCSS implementation, and working to position staff in a manner that best supported implementation. As was previously established, the superintendent worked to support teacher-driven collaboration, leadership support collaboration, and collaboration with actors—experts in the field and neighboring school districts—outside of the Ericsson school system. The chief benefit of collaboration was communication on a variety of organizational levels, which was linked to the development of a shared vision for CCSS implementation.

All stakeholders engaged in learning together was an important leadership strategy employed by the superintendent to support a unified vision for CCSS implementation. The superintendent directly connected efforts to learn about the CCSS with all stakeholders with employing a distributed leadership strategy. She referenced an
institutional shift in how time in groups was spent together: Rather than a focus on managerial tasks, district meetings focused on deep discussion of teaching and learning. Site observation data confirmed that meetings were focused on teaching and learning related to the CCSS. Further, in these settings teacher leaders functioned as facilitators of professional learning: Multiple team meetings were observed where teachers were engaged in negotiating the meaning of the CCSS, identifying resources to support implementation, developing assessments associated to measure student learning related to the CCSS, and modifying instructional plans based on their experience implementing the CCSS in the classroom.

The superintendent’s work to facilitate goal setting for CCSS implementation also emerged as a distributed process that supported a unified vision for implementation. Interview participants described a strictly structured goal-setting process that was purposeful in gathering input from district stakeholders. To obtain multiple stakeholders’ input, the superintendent held face-to-face meetings with each teacher in the district, conducted leadership team meetings to reflect on the information gathered in these teacher meetings, and drafted initial goals and then solicited multiple rounds of feedback from staff. Once thoroughly vetted, the superintendent shared the goals with the Board of Education for Board approval. The superintendent noted that goal setting is far from completed once approved by the Board, but instead is an iterative process. Interview participants reported that goals were frequently revisited to ensure appropriate progress was being made and the superintendent made adjustments to goals when necessary to better reflect the realities of CCSS implementation.
A final theme that emerged involved the superintendent’s work to position staff optimally for CCSS implementation. The superintendent’s efforts in this domain focused on two key areas: hiring and leadership. The superintendent was purposeful to “get the right people at the right seats” in formal leadership roles at central office and in the buildings. Hiring of teachers had become a more stringent process: New staff members’ proficiency with the CCSS was a chief consideration in the hiring process and the superintendent reported the district was most particular in the retention of new staff members. Where it once was uncommon to release a newly hired teacher unless significant concerns existed, the district was engaged in more robust evaluation of new teachers before granting tenure. In addition to selecting staff for leadership and teaching positions in the district, the superintendent worked to support leadership throughout the school system. By supporting a distributed leadership structure through teacher leaders, job-alike facilitators, and instructional coaches, the superintendent was able to solicit feedback for and more readily communicate a shared vision for implementation.

**Research Question #3: What challenges did the superintendent when working to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?** The superintendent faced challenges related to communication about CCSS implementation, professional development needs for staff, and teacher stress. Members of the CCSS implementation team felt the need to be proactive in their efforts to communicate with the larger school community regarding the focus and intent of the CCSS. An awareness of pushback to the CCSS that was present outside of the Ericsson community prompted the superintendent to be proactive in her communications with the community. She published blogs,
provided messages to the community, and hosted informational meetings for stakeholders with the assistance of other members of the district staff. The superintendent’s messaging was credited with keeping the larger school community “onboard” with the CCSS vision for implementation. In contrast with her communication strategy with Ericsson parents and community stakeholders, the superintendent did not push communication out to staff; rather, she employed an active listening strategy. Staff were noted to be fatigued as implementation progressed, and a growing sense of frustration emerged as textbook and other academic publishing companies did not produce well-aligned CCSS resources.

Interview participants commented on how the superintendent worked to engage directly and encourage engagement by other administrative staff to identify staff concerns and deploy what resources were available along with modified timelines for implementation.

An additional theme that emerged was the need for professional development and instructional coaching for staff. The CCSS represented a significant departure from what were considered best practices in language arts and mathematics and, as such, staff needed high levels of support to make sense of the new standards. Interview participants supported that professional development was key for supporting a shared understanding of the intent of the CCSS.

A final theme that emerged was teacher stress and burnout. CCSS implementation required teachers to significantly retool their instruction. Interview participants reported that the strain on the Ericsson system was significant and they credited the superintendent with working to alleviate stressors by incorporating feedback loops and maintaining strong relationships with teachers responsible for implementation. Deliberate feedback
loops provided staff with opportunities to give input and receive additional support or adjust timelines as necessary. Relationships with the superintendent provide an informal outlet to relieve stress; staff felt comfortable sharing their perceptions of how implementation was progressing, and being heard had a positive impact on the staff culture and climate.

Discussion

This study began with the supposition that transition to a standards-based curricular model like the CCSS would present a significant leadership challenge for school district superintendents. Transition to standards-based curricular models like the CCSS have been noted to challenge school leaders to restructure school organizations, facilitate change processes on macro and micro levels, and facilitate knowledge- and skill-building activities to ensure those charged with delivering a standards-based education to students are prepared to do so (Vogel, 2010).

To assist superintendents with this leadership challenge, this study presented a theoretical framework for leadership of the CCSS based on tenets of distributed leadership, policy implementation theory, and leadership for learning. Distributed leadership offers a supportive leadership paradigm: According to distributed leadership, leadership is not the work on one individual but is rather the work of multiple actors within a school system working in a synergistic, concertive fashion (Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2008; Spillane, 2005, 2006). Leadership for learning provides direction; it accounts for the superintendent’s steadfast focus on teaching and learning for student growth.
(Murphy, Elliot, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Policy implementation theory provides a construct by which the relationships among policies, policy actors, and the context within which implementation occurs can be explored and their influence on implementation better understood (Honig, 2006). Combined, these theoretical frameworks offer a mediating conceptual framework for leadership of the CCSS whereby student learning focused implementation of the CCSS is a product of all influencing factors.

*Figure 3. A Conceptual framework for implementation of the CCSS.*

This section provides discussion related to the extent to which the superintendent evidenced leadership behaviors consistent with this theoretical framework. Findings are discussed in relation to each of the theoretical frameworks—policy implementation, distributed leadership, and leadership for learning—that informed the conceptual
framework. Additionally, the overall extent to which the proposed conceptual framework provided an accurate description of the superintendent’s leadership practice is explored.

**Distributed leadership.** This study ascribed to a conceptualization of distributed leadership informed by theoretical propositions described by Spillane (2005, 2006) and Gronn (2000, 2002, 2008). In such a conceptualization of distributed leadership, leadership is stretched across multiple actors in a system who are working synergistically and in a concertive fashion toward a shared goal. Findings from this study demonstrated evidence of distributed leadership in the Ericsson school system. Moreover, leadership behaviors from the superintendent were linked to effective CCSS implementation.

Interdependence is foundational to distributed leadership and it informed two central components related to Spillane’s conceptualization of distributed leadership: the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). The leader-plus aspect argues that leadership is not the sole responsibility of individuals in formal positions of authority; rather, this aspect posits that leadership is the cumulative process of the work of many individuals as they exert leadership throughout the organization (Spillane, 2006). The practice aspect references interactions that occur between leaders, followers, and their situation (Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

The leader-plus and practice aspects of distributed leadership were evident in Ericsson School District’s efforts to implement the CCSS. Moreover, many of Superintendent Hannah’s leadership behaviors evidenced intentionality related to the employment of the leader-plus and practice aspects of distributed leadership.
Superintendent Hannah engaged cumulative leadership for CCSS implementation when she supported collaboration. Her work to maintain and introduce new collaborative structures that empowered job-alike facilitators—both teacher team and administrative team facilitators—to make decisions regarding implementation effectively encouraged leadership throughout the Ericsson organization. Additionally, her advocacy for, and support of, the expansion of the instructional coaching model netted a similar effect. As Assistant Principal Erik commented, “[Instructional coaches] are instructional leaders . . . [they are] that next layer of leadership we tapped into.”

The superintendent’s leadership of goal setting for CCSS implementation and her work to effectively position staff also evidenced the leader-plus and practice aspects of distributed leadership. While leading the goal-setting process, she engaged the leader-plus aspect by working with administrators, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches across the organization when she encouraged them to share their thoughts and to provide feedback for the development of implementation goals. Her leadership for goal setting also touched on the practice aspect of distributed leadership; her work to solicit feedback on multiple levels effectively fostered a reciprocal relationship between her, members of the Ericsson staff, and their task of implementing the CCSS.

Gronn’s conceptualization of distributed leadership introduced the idea of concertive action. Concertive action implies coordinated leadership acts rather than individual actions and it is thought to occur in three ways: spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations, and institutionalized practices (Gronn, 2002). Gronn posited that these three modes of concertive action represented successive stages toward conjoint
agency; conjoint agency stresses the importance of interdependence among individuals and represents the “coincidence of effort, goals, and resources in the pursuit of mutually agreed ends” (Gronn, 2002, pp. 431-432). Superintendent Hannah’s leadership efforts supported and maintained concertive institutionalized practices. Her support of collaborative structures, leadership for the expansion of the instructional coaching model, and facilitation of goal setting for implementation of the CCSS supported interdependence among members of the Ericsson staff. Her leadership in these areas represented a convergence of effort toward mutually agreed-upon ends.

**Leadership for learning.** The leadership for learning framework presented by Copland and Knapp (2006) also informed the conceptual framework for this study. Their framework focused on five components for learning focused leadership: (a) establishing a focus on learning, (b) building professional communities that value learning, (c) engaging external environments that matter for learning, (d) acting strategically and sharing leadership, and (e) creating coherence. Copland and Knapp argued that their framework be used as a mental map for school and district leaders working to foster improved educational outcomes for students in their school communities, as a lens for examining existing school and district leadership practices, and as a guide for planning leadership preparation programming. When considering superintendent leadership in the conceptual framework presented for this study, leadership for learning as a mental map for district leadership emerged as most critical. Superintendent Hannah’s leadership behaviors for implementation of the CCSS in Ericsson School District incorporated all of the characteristics of the leadership for learning framework to varying degrees.
Copland and Knapp (2006) suggested that school leaders who establish a focus on learning engage in several common leadership behaviors, including the following: situating themselves at the site of learning; interacting with administrators, teachers, and students regularly; and engaging in the development and implementation of curricular frameworks aligned to learning standards. Superintendent Hannah engaged in focused activities related to the first two behaviors, but she did not address the third in her practice. Her work to adopt a classroom provided her with opportunities to directly observe instruction related to the CCSS. In addition, interview respondents frequently noted the frequency of Superintendent Hannah’s efforts to engage with teachers regarding CCSS implementation. Elementary Principal Rose suggested that “Superintendent Hannah is out and about frequently,” and Elementary Literacy Coach and Teacher Kathryn reported that Superintendent Hannah’s frequent presence “gives her a very hands on understanding” and is “helpful” to the staff’s efforts to implement the CCSS.

Superintendent Hannah’s work to build professional communities that value learning also was represented in the findings. Learning-focused superintendents direct leadership efforts toward building and sustaining professional communities that value learning by strengthening professional development and reorganizing and reculturing central office units to support the work of those responsible for implementation (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Knapp et al., 2010). Superintendent Hannah evidenced learning-focused leadership in this domain through her work to support existing job-alike meeting structures. Additionally, her advocacy for and support of the expansion of the
instructional coaching model in Ericsson School District further supported the learning-focused nature of her leadership.

An additional component of learning focused leadership introduced by Copland and Knapp (2006) included leadership efforts to engage external environments that matter for learning. Copland and Knapp argued that learning-focused leaders engage outside groups that matter for student and teacher growth. Superintendent Hannah’s leadership for CCSS implementation of the CCSS was not contained to the staff and buildings within the district. Superintendent Hannah’s leadership was critical for engagement with area districts that were ultimately referred to as the consortium. Her leadership initiatives brought together several area elementary districts to work with their feeder high school district. This work to engage other school districts was essential for effective vertical alignment for implementation of the CCSS.

The final component of learning-focused leadership evidenced by Superintendent Hannah was her leadership work to create coherence. Copland and Knapp (2006) defined coherence in three distinct ways: (a) as the existence of an alignment between activities and the resources needed to complete them, (b) as a connection between leadership efforts and the vision for learning that is understood and carried out by teaching staff, and (c) as a working consensus among teachers from class-to-class and grade-to-grade. In the context of CCSS implementation in Ericsson School District, Superintendent Hannah’s leadership promoted coherence that most closely matched Copland and Knapp’s second definition of coherence. Her work to engage in frequent dialogue with all members of the Ericsson teaching community contributed to her robust understanding of the realities for
CCSS implementation in the classroom. She solicited extensive feedback for goal setting for implementation of the CCSS, and she worked closely with staff members to monitor the progress of implementation goals. Her leadership in this area also showed responsiveness to teachers understanding of the vision for implementation; when they suggested a need for modification of goals based on progress in the classroom, superintendent Hannah responded by adjusting the timeline for implementation.

**Policy implementation.** The final theoretical construct that informed the conceptual framework for this study was policy implementation theory. Academic literature on policy implementation has evolved over time to consider the implementation result as a product of the collective influence of the intent of policies, the context within which policies are implemented, and the influence people responsible for implementation exert on policies (Honig, 2006). In the context of this study, findings indicated that the CCSS policy, people responsible for implementation, and the context within which CCSS implementation occurred all influenced the implementation result. However, the extent to which these factors influenced implementation varied; findings demonstrated that the CCSS policy and personnel associated with the Ericsson School system greatly influenced the implementation result. Findings indicated the context where implementation occurred also influenced the implementation result, but data referenced the importance of people and the CCSS policy much more so than the site of implementation.

**Policies.** Honig (2006) argued that policy tools influence the implementation result. Top-down mandates, bottom-up change efforts, incentives, funding structures, and
regulations can all work to shape what is implemented in schools (Honig, 2001; Odden, 1991). The mandate of the CCSS was an influential factor for multiple changes in instructional practices in Ericsson School District. Interview respondents argued that the CCSS mandate functioned as the impetus for a change in teaching and learning practices across the district. In addition, data supported that the specific language of the CCSS shaped the approach teachers used when working with students.

**People.** Scholars have argued that the people associated with implementing a policy can have a substantial influence on how the policy is implemented (Honig, 2006). The same policy can be implemented very differently within separate school districts, and the educators charged with implementing a policy can influence the implementation outcome individually and/or through communities of practice (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Hill, 2006; Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006). In this study, administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers had a significant impact on the manner in which the CCSS were implemented. Observation data demonstrated that teachers had substantial autonomy to select resources to support CCSS implementation and alter instructional timelines as they determined necessary.

**Places.** Location and the associated differences between geographic regions and the educational agencies operating within those geographic regions can have a significant impact on the implementation result (Hamann & Lane, 2004; Honig, 2006; O’Day, 2002). Findings from this study indicated that the site of implementation had an impact on the CCSS implementation result. Interview data referenced the importance a consortium of local districts played in the initial interpretation of the CCSS for Ericsson
School District. Because this consortium was unique to the region in which Ericsson School District was situated, a unique influence on the implementation result was introduced.

**Implications**

Implementation of the CCSS continues to be an area of interest for practitioners, scholars, and legislators. However, despite being at the fore of public education reforms in the United States, little scholarship has explored the leadership necessary for implementation to be successful in school district settings. This study provided insights into the leadership behaviors of one successful school district superintendent as she led her district’s efforts to implement the CCSS. The findings raise four implications with regard to superintendent leadership for CCSS implementation. These implications support the conceptual framework introduced for this study as an effective lens for superintendent leadership for CCSS implementation. Superintendents and others involved in CCSS implementation may consider their influence on additional efforts to ensure the utility of the CCSS.

First, coordinated distributed leadership that originated with support and from the efforts of the superintendent facilitated a unified understanding and direction for CCSS implementation. Effective superintendent leadership for CCSS implementation must include a focus on stretching leadership across stakeholders in the system in order to promote synergy among those working to achieve a positive implementation result (Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2008; Spillane, 2005, 2006). Superintendents are encouraged to be
purposeful in this process; it is not enough for school district leaders to espouse support for such an approach. They must develop and put in place structures and systems to ensure leadership is shared. Moreover, they must communicate the existence of these structures and explain their purpose to school system stakeholders. Stakeholders must be aware that distributed leadership structures exist to enhance the capacity of the organization.

Second, and as an extension to the first implication, distributed leadership can facilitate enhanced coordination of efforts among CCSS policy, implementing people, and the site of implementation. The same organizational structures—various leadership teams, job-alike meetings, consortium with local districts—that promoted a synergy of efforts among those responsible for implementation also served as sites where a negotiated understanding of the CCSS was developed. Teachers and administrators at the site of implementation rigorously discussed the meaning of the standards and developed consensus as to how to best implement them in their local context. School superintendents should work to provide spaces for staff to engage in deep and meaningful conversations about the CCSS in order for a unified vision for implementation to emerge.

Third, superintendents should focus the bulk of their leadership efforts designed to engage stakeholders in conversation about the CCSS and for CCSS implementation on administrators, members of the Board of Education, and teachers. In this study, the engagement of the local school district community—parents and other members of the Ericsson School District constituency—was irrelevant to efforts to implement the CCSS. In Ericsson School District—a district where CCSS implementation was regarded as a
model for other school districts—efforts to engage the larger school community did not extend beyond pushing information to the community. However, superintendents working in different district contexts are encouraged to exercise caution; different district contexts where the parent community is not supportive of the CCSS may require additional focus and communication efforts from the superintendent.

Finally, learning-focused leadership from the superintendent is important for implementation of the CCSS. This study noted that several components of the leadership for learning framework presented by Copland and Knapp (2006) were at the fore of superintendent Hannah’s leadership practice. Superintendents leading for implementation of the CCSS should be mindful of this framework. They should engage in work to build small teams of teachers that work together to engage in deep discussion of best teaching practices and curricular design. In addition, superintendents should network with neighboring districts to leverage support for improved teaching and learning practices among area staffs. This practice also will support superintendents’ efforts to create coherence and complementary efforts among teachers working to implement the CCSS.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

This section contains recommendations for legislators and educational practitioners. These recommendations may be useful for others interested in furthering their thinking about how to best lead for implementation of the CCSS; however, the utility of these recommendations should be considered while recognizing the limitations associated with this study. The recommendations presented in this section are not to be
used in the absence of professional judgment and without consideration for the unique needs of the context within which implementation of the CCSS will occur.

**Recommendations for policy.** Transition to standards-based models of educating students in the public school setting significantly alters the practice of educators (Vogel, 2010). Transition to the CCSS is an ongoing endeavor and policymakers should be mindful of two recommendations that emerged from this study. These recommendations include: (a) policymakers should promote the loosely coupled nature of developing instruction to tightly coupled standards, and (b) policymakers should revisit timelines associated with similar standards-based initiatives in the future.

1. **Policymakers should promote the loosely coupled nature of developing instruction to teach to tightly coupled standards.** In recent years, a number of states have dropped out of the CCSS. When this research study began, 45 states in the United States had signed on to the CCSS. As this study concluded, the number had dropped to 43 states (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.) and policymakers in additional states were considering withdrawing from this initiative. The news media is rife with reports that indicate those opposed to implementation of the CCSS often are concerned that the CCSS usurps local control for how teachers deliver instruction in the classroom. Although it is true that the standards associated with the CCSS are by definition standardized, this study demonstrated that teachers are provided significant latitude with respect to how to teach for implementation of the CCSS. Teachers were observed discussing which instructional strategies would best support the standards, and teachers were frequently observed selecting materials they best felt would support student learning.
aligned with the standards. Additionally, this study referenced the importance of goal setting for CCSS implementation that involved the study site’s local Board of Education. Policy makers would be wise to take note that implementing common standards does not necessarily equate to prescribed instructional methods, resources, and assessments. This study demonstrated that significant local autonomy is still retained by teachers in the classroom to best support student learning at the site of instruction.

2. **Policymakers should consider timelines associated with implementation of future initiatives that are similar to the CCSS.** Interview and observation data revealed that a lack of CCSS aligned resources hindered the implementation timeline in Ericsson School District. Adequate time between adoption and implementation should be provided so that publishers and practitioners have enough time to develop aligned resources to support CCSS aligned instruction. Moreover, State or national level legislators should advocate for the development and dissemination of curricular maps, assessments, and other resource materials aligned to standards-based initiative that are released in conjunction with standards. This support will help alleviate stressors placed on districts around the country. Rather than develop materials from scratch, teachers can adapt materials to support their efforts to provide educational experiences that will help students meet established standards.

**Recommendations for practice.** The primary focus of this study was on leadership for implementation of the CCSS. As such, the findings of this study serve best to inform the leadership practices of those charged with leading this initiative in the 43 states in which it has been adopted. The findings specifically focused on leadership from
the school superintendent, and three recommendations for leadership practices for school superintendents charged with leading implementation of the CCSS are provided in this section.

1. **School superintendents should purposefully work to develop, support, and/or enhance structures that encourage collaboration between stakeholders responsible for implementation.** Findings from this study indicated that leadership practices from the superintendent that promoted collaboration closely mirrored a conceptualization of distributed leadership expressed in scholarly literature. The superintendent’s efforts to facilitate collaboration represented coordinated distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2007), and they “stretched” leadership (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) over the continuum of constituents so that interdependence for a positive implementation result was achieved (Gronn, 2002). Superintendents should be mindful to develop structures that are responsive to the various contexts within which they work.

2. **Superintendents should work to engage their districts with external environments that matter for learning.** Findings from this study indicated that implementation of the CCSS was challenged by a shortened timeline for implementation and a paucity of resources to support CCSS aligned instruction. When the superintendent exercised a tenet of the leadership for learning framework (Copland & Knapp, 2006) and constructed an implementation consortium with surrounding district’s, an important site where educators could negotiate meaning of the CCSS and develop resources to support CCSS implementation emerged. Superintendents should be mindful of this lesson and should work to engage any and all external environments that will assist with CCSS
implementation. These efforts should not be limited to engaging with local districts; modern communication tools should enable superintendents to encourage collaboration with districts across the country that are operating in similar contexts for implementation.

3. **Superintendents must work to create coherence and communicate the direction of efforts to implement the CCSS often.** Findings indicated that the superintendent’s efforts to define the current reality and communicate goals for implementation were associated with a positive implementation result. Superintendents’ efforts in this domain should build upon Copland and Knapp’s (2006) conceptualization of coherence; superintendents should work to ensure an alignment between activities related to implementation and the resources necessary to complete implementation. In addition, superintendents must align their leadership efforts with the collective vision for implementation and foster a working consensus of the vision for implementation from class-to-class and grade-to-grade.

**Recommendations for Additional Research**

Several recommendations for future research are presented in this section.

First, additional case studies that examine the leadership practices of superintendents in varied school district contexts could be completed. This study focused on one superintendent’s leadership practices in an academically high-performing, affluent K-8 school district setting. The leadership behaviors of school superintendent’s serving in school districts where students are not performing highly on standardized measures of academic achievement and/or the per-pupil expenditures are below the state
average may differ markedly from those evidenced in this study. Additionally, CCSS implementation efforts may be more challenging in a K-12 district, due to the needs to facilitate vertical curriculum coordination and alignment across elementary, middle, and high school grade configurations.

**Second, a quantitative study that examines superintendent leadership behaviors for implementation of the CCSS could be conducted.** Superintendents and members of their school district communities could be surveyed to identify what leadership behaviors they deem important for effective implementation of the CCSS. Such a study would serve as a complement to case study research methods and could help to identify patterns in effective superintendent leadership for CCSS implementation.

**Third, future research could focus on how organizational culture influences implementation of the CCSS.** In this study, the district had already embarked on a journey to implement professional learning communities (PLCs) and had implemented an instructional coaching model prior to undertaking implementation of the CCSS. In districts where the type of collegial collaboration commonly associated with the PLC structure is not present, superintendents may need to stray from distributed forms of leadership in order to model the values, norms, and protocols associated with professional collaboration.

**Finally, future studies could move the unit of study away from the superintendent and examine the leadership behaviors of central office administrators and/or principals in districts and schools where the CCSS has been implemented well.** Although the superintendent is a critical figure providing leadership
for all initiatives in school districts, those administrative leaders working closest to the classroom may evidence different leadership behaviors that can positively influence the implementation result.

**Conclusion**

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards remains a central initiative in the majority of public school districts across the United States. Currently, 43 states in the United States have adopted the CCSS (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.). Implementation of the CCSS has placed a unique strain on those charged with leading school districts, and transitioning to standards-based models challenges superintendents to reculture their school districts, facilitate the change process on macro and micro levels, and facilitate knowledge- and skill-building activities to ensure teachers are appropriately prepared to implement the standards (Vogel, 2010).

This case study provided an account of how one superintendent in Illinois provided leadership for effective implementation of the CCSS. The study developed a conceptual framework constructed on tenets of distributed leadership, policy implementation, and leadership for learning. Combined, these theoretical frameworks offered a mediating conceptual framework for leadership of the CCSS; in this model student learning focused implementation of the CCSS was thought to be a reflection of the CCSS policy, the context of the implementation site, and the stakeholders responsible for implementation rather than the product of a blunt policy instrument made to fit the school organization.
Findings supported the utility of this framework for thinking about effective superintendent leadership for CCSS implementation. In this case study, the superintendent was identified as an important leader for effective implementation of the CCSS. She evidenced tenets of leadership for learning (Copland & Knapp, 2006) in her work to maintain a focus on student learning, build professional communities that valued learning, engage external environments that matter for learning, and create coherence for implementation. The superintendent demonstrated distributed leadership in her work to structure the organization for collaboration and recruit leaders at all levels. Additionally, she extended distributed leadership and fostered interdependence among key influences that policy implementation scholarship has identified as important for implementation: policies, people, and places (Honig, 2006).

While useful in the context of this study, this conceptual framework remains unproven. Further research should be directed toward examining the utility of this framework for leading the CCSS in other school districts that differ in size, grade-level structures, fiscal health, academic performance, and student demographics. However, what is certain is that this conceptual framework provides a starting point for purposeful thinking about how to successfully lead for implementation of the CCSS.
References


Callahan, R. E. (1962). Education and the cult of efficiency: A study of the social forces that have shaped the administration of public schools. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.


Appendix A

Email Soliciting Candidates

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are being asked to identify school district superintendents that closely fit the description below. The purpose for this identification is to nominate potential study sites for a multiple-case study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). When nominating a superintendent or superintendents, please reflect on the criteria listed. If you are unsure if a superintendent meets the criteria, add the name and the nominated individual will be checked for a match with the criteria. All nominations will be treated as confidential. At no time will your name be disclosed to a nominee.

Reflect on the following criteria and identify those superintendents that most closely ascribe to the behaviors, leadership philosophies, and professional responsibilities identified.

- The superintendent is heavily involved in curricular leadership and is an active participant in the school district’s implementation of the CCSS.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has been well received by staff, students, parents, and/or community members.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has a reputation as a model for other school districts.
- The superintendent has served in his/her position with the same district for at least three consecutive years.

Should you have any questions or need clarification about the nomination process, please email (filippi@illinois.edu) or call (847.714.3027) at any time. To nominate a superintendent that fits the criteria identified above, please send the individual’s name, school district, and city in the body of an email to filippi@illinois.edu.

Regards,

John R. Filippi, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix B

Follow-up Email Soliciting Candidates for IASA Members or ROE Superintendents Not Responding

Dear Sir or Madam,

One week ago, I contacted you to ask that you nominate school district superintendents for participation in a research study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Please reflect on the criteria listed below and reply as soon as you are able. If you are unsure if a superintendent meets the criteria, add the name and the nominated individual will be checked for a match with the criteria. All nominations will be treated as confidential. At no time will your name be disclosed to a nominee.

Reflect on the following criteria and identify those superintendents that most closely ascribe to the behaviors, leadership philosophies, and professional responsibilities identified.

- The superintendent is heavily involved in curricular leadership and is an active participant in the school district’s implementation of the CCSS.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has been well received by staff, students, parents, and/or community members.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has a reputation as a model for other school districts.
- The superintendent has served in his/her position with the same district for at least three consecutive years.

Should you have any questions or need clarification about the nomination process, please email (filippi@illinois.edu) or call (847.714.3027) at any time. To nominate a superintendent that fits the criteria identified above, please send the individual’s name, school district, and city in the body of an email to filippi@illinois.edu.

Regards,

John R. Filippi, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix C

Solicitation Message for Professional Contacts

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are being asked to identify school district superintendents that closely fit the description below. The purpose for this identification is to nominate potential study sites for a multiple-case study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). When nominating a superintendent or superintendents, please reflect on the criteria listed. If you are unsure if a superintendent meets the criteria, add the name and the nominated individual will be checked for a match with the criteria. All nominations will be treated as confidential. At no time will your name be disclosed to a nominee.

Reflect on the following criteria and identify those superintendents that most closely ascribe to the behaviors, leadership philosophies, and professional responsibilities identified.

- The superintendent is heavily involved in curricular leadership and is an active participant in the school district’s implementation of the CCSS.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has been well received by staff, students, parents, and/or community members.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has a reputation as a model for other school districts.
- The superintendent has served in his/her position with the same district for a least three consecutive years.

Should you have any questions or need clarification about the nomination process, please email (filippi@illinois.edu) or call (847.714.3027) at any time. To nominate a superintendent that fits the criteria above, please send the individual’s name, school district, and city in the body of an email to filippi@illinois.edu.

If you know of other professional educators that may have knowledge school superintendents that fit the above criteria, please feel free to direct their attention to this message.

Regards,

John R. Filippi, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix D

Email Notifying Candidates of Their Nomination

Dear [Insert Name],

You are being contacted because you have been nominated to participate in a multiple-case study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Nominations were sought through the 25-member Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) governing board and Illinois Regional Office of Education (ROE) superintendents. IASA board members and ROE superintendents were asked to identify school district superintendents who closely match the following criteria:

• The superintendent is heavily involved in curricular leadership and is an active participant in the school district’s implementation of the CCSS.
• The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has been well received by staff, students, parents, and/or community members.
• The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has a reputation as a model for other school districts.
• The superintendent has served in his/her position with the same district for at least three consecutive years.

Should you choose to accept the nomination, you will participate in an initial phone interview to screen candidate sites. If you are selected for inclusion in the study, you and members of your school community will participate in face-to-face interviews, a researcher will conduct a site observation of a presentation or other meeting outside of the classroom associated with implementation of the CCSS, and applicable district documents will be reviewed.

This study will employ a chained-referral sampling method to identify two or three study sites. At the conclusion of the initial interview, you will be asked to nominate additional superintendents that match the above criteria. Please indicate your interest for participation in this study by email (filippi@illinois.edu) or phone (847.714.3027). If you choose to participate, an informed consent form will be delivered to you by email and a phone conference time scheduled.

Regards,

John R. Filippi, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix E

Follow-up Email for Nominated Candidates Not Responding

Dear [Insert Name],

One week ago, I contacted you because you have been nominated to participate in a multiple-case study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Nominations were sought through the 25-member Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) governing board and Illinois Regional Office of Education (ROE) superintendents. IASA board members and ROE superintendents were asked to identify school district superintendents who closely match the following criteria:

- The superintendent is heavily involved in curricular leadership and is an active participant in the school district’s implementation of the CCSS.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has been well received by staff, students, parents, and/or community members.
- The superintendent’s leadership has resulted in a CCSS implementation process that has a reputation as a model for other school districts.
- The superintendent has served in his/her position with the same district for at least three consecutive years.

Should you choose to accept the nomination, you will participate in an initial phone interview to screen candidate sites. If you are selected for inclusion in the study, you and members of your school community will participate in face-to-face interviews, a researcher will conduct a site observation of a presentation or other meeting outside of the classroom associated with implementation of the CCSS, and applicable district documents will be reviewed. This study will employ a chained-referral sampling method to identify two or three study sites. At the conclusion of the initial interview, you will be asked to nominate additional superintendents that match the above criteria.

Please indicate your interest for participation in this study by email (filippi@illinois.edu) or phone (847.714.3027). If you choose to participate, an informed consent form will be delivered to you by email and a phone conference time scheduled.

Regards,

John R. Filippi, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Appendix F

Initial Superintendent Phone Interview

Introduction and Purpose

Today, I am calling because you have agreed to participate in a multiple-case study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Nominations were sought through the 25-member Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) governing board and Illinois Regional Office of Education superintendents. You were selected because your professional practice closely matches a set of criteria deemed important for this study.

As indicated on the informed consent form, this interview will be recorded and the audio recording transcribed by a professional. Once the recording has been transcribed, all personally identifiable information will be removed and replaced by pseudonyms. When completed, the transcript will be emailed to you and you will have an opportunity to clarify or amend your responses. Should you wish to stop the interview at any time, you may do so.

Questions

1. Briefly describe your leadership platform.
2. Describe your involvement in curriculum and instruction. Have you been significantly involved in your district’s transition to the CCSS?
3. Do you engage in deliberate action to share leadership? If so, share the structure of such efforts.
4. Briefly describe your vision of implementing the CCSS in your school district. If you engage in efforts to share leadership, has that shared leadership extended to implementation of the CCSS?
5. Have efforts to lead for implementation of the CCSS involved members outside of the school organization? If so, who?
6. Would you like to ask any questions about this study?

Chained-referral Sampling Opportunity

This study employs a chained-referral method of sampling. Do you have knowledge of any practicing school district superintendents that match the criteria indicated in the nomination email you received? If so, please send the individual’s name, school district, and city in the body of an email to filippi@illinois.edu.
This concludes the screening interview. As I have indicated, I will send you the transcript of this interview by email and you may clarify or amend any statements. Should you and your district be selected for participation in the study, you will be notified by email.
Appendix G

IRB Application/Approval

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research
Institutional Review Board
528 East Green Street
Suite 203
Champaign, IL 61820

January 15, 2013

Donald Hackmann
Ed Organization and Leadership
334 Education Bldg
1310 South Sixth St
MC 708

RE: The Role of the Illinois School District Superintendent in Common Core State Standards
Implementation: A Multiple Case Study
IRB Protocol Number: 13471

Dear Donald:

Thank you for submitting the completed IRB application form for your project entitled The Role of the Illinois School District Superintendent in Common Core State Standards Implementation: A Multiple Case Study. Your project was assigned Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Number 13471 and reviewed. It has been determined that the research activities described in this application meet the criteria for exemption at 45CFR46.101(b). Category 1 applies since the study uses individual and group interviews and meeting/presentation observations to determine how selected school superintendents lead for Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The study occurs in commonly accepted school district administrative settings, and is attempting to determine how district superintendent leadership functions to effectively support the teaching and other administrative staff in implementing CCSS.

This determination of exemption only applies to the research study as submitted. Exempt protocols are approved for a maximum of three years. Please note that additional modifications to your project need to be submitted to the IRB for review and exemption determination or approval before the modifications are initiated.

We appreciate your conscientious adherence to the requirements of human subjects research. If you have any questions about the IRB process, or if you need assistance at any time, please feel free to contact me or the IRB Office, or visit our website at http://www.irb.illinois.edu.

Sincerely,

Belinda Adamson, Human Subjects Research Coordinator, Institutional Review Board

c: John Filippi
Appendix H

Informed Consent: Superintendent

Dear Sir or Madam,

This letter is written to request your and your school district’s participation in a study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This study is affiliated with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mr. John Filippi, doctoral candidate, and Dr. Donald Hackmann, Associate Professor, will facilitate the study.

Academic literature on district-level leadership for implementation of centralized educational reforms is relatively thin. This multiple-case study will assist in filling this gap in the literature. It will involve a series of semi-structured, one-on-one and focus group interviews with school district superintendents and members of their curricular development teams. Additionally, the study will include site observation of a presentation or other event not in the classroom that is associated with implementation of the CCSS. A separate informed consent letter is distributed to participants for such observations. Pertinent documents will also be reviewed to develop a robust and complete understanding of the leadership behaviors of school district superintendents as they lead for implementation of the CCSS. Emergent themes from each of the selected study sites will be identified and a cross-case analysis will be conducted to identify themes that emerge across sites. Results of this study will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation and may be shared in a conference presentation or publication. At no time will any personally identifiable information be included in any presentation or publication.

You and your school district’s participation in this study are completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked first to participate in one initial site screening phone interview. If you and your school district are selected for inclusion in the study, you will participate in two additional face-to-face interviews and members of your curricular development team will participate in a focus group interview. All interviews will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. In addition, site observations and document review will be employed to add to the development of themes.

All interviews will be audio recorded and a professional will transcribe the recordings. All identifiable information will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. The original recordings will be deleted following receipt of the transcriptions. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, you may request that the researcher take detailed notes in lieu of the audio recording. Copies of transcribed interviews or notes will be sent to participants by email and participants will have an opportunity to clarify or amend their responses by email.
Once again, you and your school district’s participation in this study are completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your professional employment in any way, nor will it affect your relationship with the University of Illinois. In addition, it is not anticipated that you or any member of your district will assume any risk greater than normal life by participating in this study. However, should you or any member of your district wish to terminate participation in the study, that option is available at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mr. John Filippi by email (filippi@illinois.edu) or phone (847.714.3027). Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Donald Hackmann by email (dghack@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.0230).

Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

John R. Filippi

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information and, on behalf of myself and the school district, voluntarily agree to participate in the research study.

Signature: ____________________________
Position: ____________________________
District: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board by email (irb@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.2670). Collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant.
Appendix I

Informed Consent: Focus Group Interview

Dear Sir or Madam,

This letter is written to request your participation in a study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This study is affiliated with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mr. John Filippi, doctoral candidate, and Dr. Donald Hackmann, Associate Professor, will facilitate the study.

Academic literature on district-level leadership for implementation of centralized educational reforms is relatively thin. This multiple-case study will assist in filling this gap in the literature. It will involve a series of semi-structured, one-on-one and focus group interviews with school district superintendents and members of their curricular development teams. Additionally, the study will include site observations of a presentation or other event not in the classroom that is associated with implementation of the CCSS. A separate informed consent letter is distributed to participants for such observations. Pertinent documents will also be reviewed to develop a robust and complete understanding of the leadership behaviors of school district superintendents as they lead for implementation of the CCSS. Emergent themes from each of the selected study sites will be identified and a cross-case analysis will be conducted to identify themes that emerge across sites. Results of this study will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation and may be shared in a conference presentation or publication. At no time will any personally identifiable information be included in any presentation or publication.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group interview with other members of your district’s curricular development team. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

The interview will be audio recorded and a professional will transcribe the recordings. All identifiable information will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. The original recordings will be deleted following receipt of the transcriptions. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, you may request that the researcher take detailed notes in lieu of the audio recording. Copies of transcribed interviews or notes will be sent to participants by email and participants will have an opportunity to clarify or amend their responses by email.

If you agree to participate, you are asked to respect the privacy of the focus group interview session and not discuss any comments or information shared by participants.
However, please recognize that the researcher cannot guarantee participants do not discuss what was said during the interview after it has occurred.

Once again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your professional employment in any way, nor will it affect your relationship with the University of Illinois. In addition, it is not anticipated that you will assume any risk greater than normal life by participating in this study. However, should you wish to terminate participation in the study, that option is available at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mr. John Filippi by email (filippi@illinois.edu) or phone (847.714.3027). Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Donald Hackmann by email (dghack@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.0230).

Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

John R. Filippi

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research study.

Signature: ________________________
Position: _________________________
District: _________________________
Date: ________________

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board by email (irb@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.2670). Collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant.
Appendix J

Informed Consent: Focus Group Follow-up Interview

Dear Sir or Madam,

This letter is written to request your participation in a study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This study is affiliated with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mr. John Filippi, doctoral candidate, and Dr. Donald Hackmann, Associate Professor, will facilitate the study.

Academic literature on district-level leadership for implementation of centralized educational reforms is relatively thin. This case study will assist in filling this gap in the literature. It will involve a series of semi-structured, one-on-one and focus group interviews with a school district superintendent and members of his/her curricular development team. Additionally, the study will include site observations of a presentation or other event not in the classroom that is associated with implementation of the CCSS. A separate informed consent letter is distributed to participants for such observations. Pertinent documents will also be reviewed to develop a robust and complete understanding of the leadership behaviors the school district superintendent as he/she leads for implementation of the CCSS. Results of this study will be used as part of a doctoral dissertation and may be shared in a conference presentation or publication. At no time will any personally identifiable information be included in any presentation or publication.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes.

The interview will be audio recorded and a professional will transcribe the recordings. All identifiable information will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. The original recordings will be deleted following receipt of the transcriptions. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, you may request that the researcher take detailed notes in lieu of the audio recording. Copies of transcribed interviews or notes will be sent to you by email and you will have an opportunity to clarify or amend your responses by email.

Once again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your professional employment in any way, nor will it affect your relationship with the University of Illinois. In addition, it is not anticipated that you will assume any risk greater than normal life by participating in this
study. However, should you wish to terminate participation in the study, that option is available at any time.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mr. John Filippi by email (filippi@illinois.edu) or phone (847.714.3027). Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Donald Hackmann by email (dghack@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.0230).

Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

John R. Filippi

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research study.

Signature: ________________________
Position: _________________________
District: _________________________
Date: ____________________________

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board by email (irb@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.2670). Collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant.
Appendix K

Informed Consent: Site Observation

Dear Sir or Madam,

This letter is written to request your participation in a study that seeks to investigate the relationship between superintendent leadership and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This study is affiliated with the Department of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Mr. John Filippi, doctoral candidate, and Dr. Donald Hackmann, Associate Professor, will facilitate the study.

Academic literature on district-level leadership for implementation of centralized educational reforms is relatively thin. This multiple-case study will assist in filling this gap in the literature. As part of the data collection for this study, an observation of a presentation or other event outside of the classroom that is associated with implementation of the CCSS will be completed. You are being asked to participate in such an observation.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Should you choose to participate, you are asked to allow the researcher to observe you during a presentation or other event associated with implementing the CCSS. The observation will last for the duration of the selected event.

During the observation, the researcher will take field notes. The field notes will be transcribed and all identifiable information will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. A copy of the transcribed notes will be sent to you by email and you will have an opportunity to clarify or amend your responses by email.

Once again, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your professional employment in any way, nor will it affect your relationship with the University of Illinois. In addition, it is not anticipated that you will assume any risk greater than normal life by participating in this study. However, should you wish to terminate participation in the study, that option is available at any time. Additionally, you or any other participant may ask the researcher to leave the room at any time during the observation.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Mr. John Filippi by email (filippi@illinois.edu) or phone (847.714.3027). Alternatively, you may contact Dr. Donald Hackmann by email (dghack@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.0230).
Please retain a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sincerely,

John R. Filippi

STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information and voluntarily agree to participate in the research study.

Signature: __________________________
Position: __________________________
District: __________________________
Date: __________________________

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board by email (irb@illinois.edu) or phone (217.333.2670). Collect calls will be accepted if you identify yourself as a research participant.
Appendix L

Superintendent Interview #1 Questions

1. Please describe your understanding of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
2. How did your understanding of the CCSS develop?
3. Describe your vision for leadership of CCSS implementation.
4. What structures, supports, or activities have you engaged in or put in place to support implementation?
5. Have you noted differences between your understanding of the intent of the CCSS and the understanding shared by district staff and members of the school community?
6. If there are differences, how have those differences manifest themselves?
7. You and your district were selected because you ascribe to a philosophy of leadership that is inclusive of all constituents. Describe how your work—and the work of the organization—has been structured to ascribe to this philosophy.
8. How has leadership for implementation of the CCSS been “stretched” across constituents in the school community? Please provide specific examples.
9. Reflecting on the implementation of the CCSS in your district thus far, what challenges would you suggest other superintendents be mindful of and how would you suggest they lead the process of implementation in their districts?
10. Do you think the results of this study will be valuable to you and your district? If so, why?
Appendix M

Superintendent Interview #2 Questions

Warm-up:
1. With regard to CCSS implementation, what successes have taken place since we last spoke?
2. With regard to CCSS implementation, what obstacles have been present since we last spoke?

Research Question #1 - In what behaviors and activities do effective superintendents engage, as they lead the implementation of the CCSS?

Collaboration:
3. In the previous interview, you noted collaborative structures often. What collaborative structures were essential to successful implementation of the CCSS?
4. What was the genesis of each collaborative structure?
5. How were you involved in coordinating each collaborative structure?

Superintendent as Learning Leader:
6. In the previous interview, you suggested that cultivating a deep understanding of the CCSS was essential to your work as superintendent. Describe the impact your understanding has had on implementation of the CCSS in your district.

Superintendent Assesses System Capacity:
7. What activities do you engage in to assess the school district’s capacity for implementing the CCSS?

Superintendent Providing/Coordinating Professional Development/Coaching:
8. How has the evolution of the coaching model contributed to implementation of the CCSS?
9. How has the board responded to the expansion of the instructional coaching model? How have teachers responded?
10. In the previous interview, you noted that professional development was essential to implementation of the CCSS. What professional development opportunities have you worked to bring to your school district? What work was involved for you to bring these professional development opportunities to your district?

Research Question #2 - How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?

Collaboration:
11. How has collaboration helped to unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?
12. What stakeholders have been involved in collaboration for implementation of the CCSS?
All Stakeholders Learning Together:
13. In the previous interview, you mentioned “learning together” as an important ingredient for successful implementation of the CCSS. Describe the leadership necessary for “learning together” to be successful. Who has been providing this leadership?

Goal Setting:
14. Who is involved in goal setting for implementation of the CCSS?
15. What systems of accountability are utilized to ensure goals are met?

Superintendent Positions Staff Correctly:
16. It was previously identified that you have worked to position staff correctly for implementation of the CCSS. If you feel this statement is accurate, please discuss and provide any relevant examples.

Research Question #3 - What challenges has the superintendent faced as she has worked to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?

Superintendent Communication/Messaging:
17. What communications from your office have been critical for implementation of the CCSS?
18. How have you communicated CCSS implementation success stories?
19. What resistance to CCSS implementation has the district experienced?
20. What actions/communications did you undertake to overcome resistance? Was it successful? Please explain.

Superintendent Providing/Coordinating Professional Development/Coaching:
21. How has professional development worked to bring about consensus for CCSS implementation?

Superintendent Identifies and Relieves Stress in System:
22. In a previous interview, it was noted that your work to identify and relieve stress in the school system has been essential to implementation of the CCSS. If you agree with this statement, what activities did you engage in to identify these stressors?
23. How did you work to relieve stressors?
Appendix N

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. How long have you been meeting together? How often do you meet and work together?
2. How did your understanding of the CCSS develop?
3. Is there a district-wide vision for implementation of the CCSS? If so, please describe it.
4. Have you noted differences between your understanding of the intent of the CCSS and the understanding shared by district administrators, teachers, and the school community?
5. If there are differences, how have those differences manifest themselves?
6. How has the superintendent been involved in implementation of the CCSS?
7. Please describe two or three leadership practices the superintendent has engaged in that have been helpful to CCSS implementation.
8. Has the superintendent worked to “stretch” leadership for implementation of the CCSS across all constituents? If so, has any professional development been provided to do so? Please provide specific examples.
9. Reflecting on the implementation of the CCSS in your district thus far, what challenges have you faced?
Appendix O

Focus Group Follow-Up Interview Questions

Warm-up:
1. With regard to CCSS implementation, what successes have taken place since we last spoke?
2. With regard to CCSS implementation, what obstacles have been present since we last spoke?

Research Question #1 - In what behaviors and activities do effective superintendents engage, as they lead the implementation of the CCSS?

Collaboration:
3. Collaborative structures have been noted to be important for successful implementation of the CCSS; what collaborative structures were essential to successful implementation of the CCSS?
4. What was the genesis of each collaborative structure?
5. Was the superintendent involved in coordinating any of these collaborative structures? If so, which ones and how? If not the superintendent, who else coordinated these structures?

Superintendent as Learning Leader:
6. Does the superintendent posses a deep understanding of the CCSS? If so, what impact has this understanding had on implementation of the CCSS in your district.

Superintendent Assesses System Capacity:
7. Has the superintendent engaged in any activities to assess the school district’s capacity for implementing the CCSS? If yes, what activities?

Superintendent Providing/Coordinating Professional Development/Coaching:
8. How has the evolution of the coaching model contributed to implementation of the CCSS?
9. How has the board responded to the expansion of the instructional coaching model? How have teachers responded?
10. It has been noted that professional development was essential to implementation of the CCSS. What professional development opportunities have been important to implementation of the CCSS? Was the superintendent involved in working to bring these professional development opportunities to the district? If so, how?

Research Question #2 - How does a distributed approach to leadership from the superintendent unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?

Collaboration:
11. How has collaboration helped to unite stakeholder visions for implementation of the CCSS?
12. What stakeholders have been involved in collaboration for implementation of the CCSS?

*All Stakeholders Learning Together:*

13. It was mentioned that “learning together” was an important ingredient for successful implementation of the CCSS. Describe the leadership necessary for “learning together” to be successful. Who has provided this leadership?

*Goal Setting:*

14. Who is involved in goal setting for implementation of the CCSS?
15. What systems of accountability are utilized to ensure goals are met?

*Superintendent Positions Staff Correctly:*

16. It was previously identified that the superintendent has worked to position staff correctly for implementation of the CCSS. If you feel this statement is accurate, please discuss and provide any relevant examples.

**Research Question #3 - What challenges has the superintendent faced as she has worked to unite stakeholder visions of curricula with the CCSS?**

*Superintendent Communication/Messaging:*

17. Have communications from the superintendent been important for implementation of the CCSS? If yes, what communications and how so?
18. How have CCSS implementation success stories been communicated?
19. What resistance to CCSS implementation has the district experienced?
20. In what ways, if any, have communications and actions of the superintendent been helpful to overcoming such resistance?

*Superintendent Providing/Coordinating Professional Development/Coaching:*

21. How has professional development worked to bring about consensus for CCSS implementation?

*Superintendent Identifies and Relieves Stress in System:*

22. In a previous interview, it was noted that the superintendent’s work to identify and relieve stress in the school system was essential to implementation of the CCSS. What activities did the superintendent engage in to identify these stressors?
23. How did the superintendent work to relieve stressors?
## Appendix P

**Site Observation Protocol**

Date: ______________________

Location: ______________________

Participants: ______________________

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Descriptive Notes</th>
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## Appendix Q

### Interview Log

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<td>24-Oct-2013</td>
<td>Superintendent Hannah</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
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<td>18-Dec-2013</td>
<td>Asst. Sup. Grace</td>
<td>District Office</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Elementary Principal Rose</td>
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<tr>
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<td>MS Asst. Principal Erik</td>
<td>Phone</td>
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</table>
Appendix R

Site Observation Log

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Individual/ Group Activity</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31-Jan-2014</td>
<td>ELA CCSS Aligned Assessment Writing/ 7th &amp; 8th grade LA teachers and MS Lit Coaches</td>
<td>Ericsson Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-Feb-2014</td>
<td>All District Institute</td>
<td>Ericsson Elementary &amp; Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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