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Gayla Fredrickson
South Dakota University

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The Emergence of the CEO

Gayla Fredrickson

South Dakota University

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A decade ago a study was completed on the "Typical" Superintendent in South Dakota (Uhl & Engelking, 1993). Since that time, an administrative mandate has occurred in the state that has affected the top administrative job. As of July, 1996, the requirement of a superintendent's endorsement as a condition of employment as the chief of a school district was eliminated. The state created the "CEO" (Chief Executive Officer) of local school districts. These CEOs could serve as the lead administrative officer of a local school district without any formal training in education.

There seemed to be an assumption among policy makers that principals and other school employees would step into the CEO option and little negative impact would occur. Indeed, Governor Janklow was famous in local circles for his comment that any local barber could run a school district.

The CEO option began to have immediate impact. During the 1996-97 school year, the state had 15 CEO's in the position of superintendent (No data on full time teaching equivalencies (FTEs) was available). During the 1997-98 school year the state listed 13.5 FTE's as CEO's in the superintendency. The 1998-99 school year saw the third increase in CEO's with the state listing 18.17 FTE's. During the 1999-2000 school year, 24.25 FTE's were CEO's. During the 2000-2001 school year, the data was not available but responses to the survey sent out by this researcher found that 29 respondents identified themselves as a CEO or about twice as many as during the initial year of 1996-97. This increase in the use of CEO's is occurring at the same time the state reported a 9.5% drop in the numbers of administrators in the state since 1988.

During the winter of 2000, superintendents and CEO's in South Dakota's public K-12 school districts were surveyed to determine:

- What percentage of the schools were currently using the CEO alternative.
- What geographic areas of the state, if any, were using the alternative most heavily.
- What was the breakdown of the various levels of training of both CEO's and Superintendents.
- What type of support and professional development was most desired by those serving as the top administrator of a school district.

- What were the future plans of people currently serving as CEO's"

Of the 170 surveys sent to local school superintendents/CEO's. 155 were returned. This was a response rate of 91%. Of the 155 practitioners responding, 29 indicated they were a CEO and lacked the superintendent's certificate. So, during the 2000-2001 school year, 19% of the school districts in South Dakota were being led by CEO's.

CEO's by Geographic Region

The survey respondents were asked to include their zip code so that area of the state could be identified. The state was divided into roughly four equal quadrants. Of the 29 self reported CEO's, seventeen were located in the Northeast Quadrant, five were located in the Southeast Quadrant, two were located in the Southwest Quadrant, and five were located in the Northwest Quadrant.

Levels of Professional Degrees

Superintendents responding to the survey possessed the following levels of professional degrees: 34% had a Masters (M.A., M.S., or M.Ed.), 47.5% held a Specialist Degree (Ed.S.), and 18.5% indicated that they held a Doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.).

CEO respondents indicated the following levels of professional degrees: 75.8% had a Masters (M.A., M.S., or M.Ed.), 3.4% possessed a Specialist (Ed.S.), 3.4% had a Doctorate (Ph.D. or Ed.D.) and finally, 17.3% indicated they possessed a Bachelor in Education Degree or did not indicate any formal educational training.

When the two groups were combined, the following picture emerged: Bachelors or less 03%, Masters 41%, Specialist 39%, and Doctorate 16%. These results were compared to the findings of Uhl and Engelking (1991). They had reported the following preparation levels: Masters 57%, Specialist 23%, and Doctorate 20%. The data revealed that during the past decade in South Dakota there has been a drop in the number of administrators holding Doctor or Master Degrees, while there has been an increase in the number of administrators holding a Bachelor or Specialist Degrees.

Professional Development

Participants in the survey were presented with the

following list of state and national organizations that promote professional growth and asked which they used to support their own growth. (The percentage after the

organization indicated the percent of respondents indicating they often or sometimes used the organization for growth).

Table 1.

Professional Development Survey

Organization	Supt.	CEO
Associated School Boards of South Dakota,	85%	83%
School Administrators of South Dakota,	87%	72%
State Department of Education Workshops,	71%	83%
College and University Course work,	68%	83%
South Dakota Superintendent's Association	85%	69%
The American Association of School Administrators	53%	37%
Regional In-service	73%	90%
Coalition of Small Schools	71%	83%

The results clearly indicate that statewide professional organizations are very important to the local administrator in the area of professional growth. In fact, if the responses were broken down so that only the OFTEN category was used, the Associated School Boards of South Dakota, and the School Administrators of South Dakota held the greatest percentage of indicated use.

The follow-up question concerning the types of activities needed to give better support to administrators in general and superintendents in particular received some interesting and thought-provoking responses. There were four key differences between beginning administrators and those who had served longer than a year as a superintendent/CEO.

Needs perceived for the incoming administrators included:

1. "A calendar/checklist of mandates/deadlines that need to be done as a first year superintendent. It would be nice to have a year guideline to review."

2. "Helping administrators to build good networks among their peers. Having a place to get good answers to specific school related questions."
3. "Ways to attract good people to the profession and to help get people certified."
4. "A mentor would be nice." (The need for mentorship was noted in several beginning superintendents' responses.)

Administrators in general indicated a great need for "HOT TOPIC" seminars put on by state organizations. The preference was for one-day regional in-services throughout the school year and a two to three day format during the summer months. State mandates, school accountability, school improvement, legal issues, and special education (IDEA) were mentioned as areas needing continuous training and support.

Numerous respondents pointed out the difference between leadership and management. Participants noted that

much of their time was spent in the day to day management of the school district, but they believed there was a statewide need in continuing to develop vision, leadership, and administrative mission in the superintendency. The Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) Workshops were noted as having provided leadership assistance to administrators, and numerous respondents indicated that there was a consistent need for the type of workshops and activities that LEAD had conducted in South Dakota in the early 90's.

Administrators also focused on the need to have positive communications about school systems in general and about the role of the superintendent/CEO to go out to the public. As one respondent noted, "To let the patrons know that our job is important and stressful, and that it should not be combined with several other important positions within the school system (i.e., Elementary Principal, Secondary Principal, Special Ed Director, Guidance Counselor, Athletic Director, etc.) It was suggested that the Associated School Boards of South Dakota in particular work with boards to understand the benefits of giving the chief administrative officer a two year contract versus the one-year contract often used by smaller school districts.

Participants noted the improvement in training provided by state offices. "The state department is beginning to take a larger role in providing professional development activities for administrators. In the past, this area was left up to higher education institutions that offered a mixture of opportunities (Graduate coursework/LEAD workshops). With the advent of our distance learning emphasis, the V-tel equipment should be able to bring relevant, up-to-date training right inside our school buildings. . . . As we try to find resource people for these local in-services, The Department of Education and Cultural Affairs and the universities can provide valuable resources. The governor's Technology for Teaching and Learning (TTL) academies and the new reading enhancement program are excellent examples of where the state is stepping in to help provide top notch training to our educators. It would be extremely difficult for a small local district to provide in-services of that caliber by ourselves. We need more of this cooperation and working together to support administrators and help them make the difference in their school" While distance learning was seen as a viable training tool, superintendents/CEO's stressed the importance of being able to get together in small regional groups to discuss issues and concerns on an ongoing basis. Contact with other administrators was seen a vital in the area of support.

Fiscal management and budgetary concerns were mentioned on a consistent basis. The declining enrollments of many school districts and the need for planning by community members and school board representatives were mentioned repeatedly. The following wry comment from a superintendent indicates the frustration and needs that exist. "Well, it is a lot easier and more fun to run a school system when you have a little money as opposed to when you do

not. I have been in this business over 30 years now and this is the toughest time I have seen. The best support would be how to manage in the leanest of times, with the least experience, while enrollments are dropping, and everyone in sight is retiring."

Finally, participants noted that there needed to be a climate change within the state. There has been a somewhat adversarial approach taken by many in elected office towards administrators in general and superintendents/CEO's in particular. This needs to change if progress is to be made toward long range planning, and problem solving is to take place. "More intensive, academy type training sessions on specific issues and programs which the state educational leaders and high ranking politicians want to implement are needed. This should be supported financially by legislation, Department of Education, or governor's direct funding. The training sessions should be cohesive, have a solid game plan, and bring all players into the fold. If superintendents and CEO's were to be involved in the planning of this type of training and leadership programs, it would help to gain more trust and understanding of the people in the field. It could help solidify common goals between political leaders, State Department of Education officials, and the superintendents/CEO's who have been hired to lead the local school district efforts."

Seventy-eight percent of the administrators responding indicated that they hold current professional membership in the School Administrators of South Dakota (SASD). This is a significant decline in membership from the data collected in 1990-91 (Uhl and Engelking) which showed a ninety-five percent membership in SASD. Seventy-five percent of the respondents indicated they belong to the State Superintendents Association (SDSSA). This represented an eight-percent drop in the numbers indicating membership in 1990-91. Only fifty percent of the administrators indicated membership in the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). This number represented a drop in membership from the 55 percent reporting membership in 1990-91.

Need for Support

Survey respondents were asked about professional areas and the importance these areas had in the daily management of the school district. Participants were asked to rank the items as Very Important (3), Important (2), and Somewhat Important (1). By averaging the assigned numerical values the following table was developed.

It is interesting to note that while superintendents viewed student performance as the most important area needing support, CEO's believed that fiscal management needed the most support. However, both groups indicated that student performance and fiscal management were the two most important areas in their school district needing support.

The greatest disparity in viewpoint occurred in the area

of Supervising the Instructional Program. Superintendents gave this a ranking of 2.11 while CEO respondents gave it a ranking of 1.43. In this finding, South Dakota superintendents were in line with results of a national study that found 96.9 percent of superintendents believed they possess skills in staff development and 92.3 percent indicated expertise in curriculum design. These high percentages indicate the importance that superintendents nationwide give to supervising the instructional program and suggest the importance of superintendents as instructional leaders (Cooper, 2000).

Why CEO's ranked supervision significantly lower than their certificated counterparts needs more study. Such a study might seek to: Determine the levels of supervision CEO's have been exposed to; What educational internships they have completed prior to accepting the position of CEO; and If they have taken coursework that explores the relationship between supervision and school district effectiveness.

The second area of significant variance in viewpoint was that of Effective Communication Skills. The superintendents' group gave that a mean rating of 2.08 while the CEO cohort gave it a rating of 1.85. Even the higher rating given by the superintendents may be somewhat lower than the importance given to the area by the national survey. Ninety-nine and one half percent of the superintendents in the national survey indicated they possess "high/moderate" skills in this area. Cooper (2000) noted "The abilities to work with people, communicate, and relate to communities are the 'survival skills' of the superintendencies."

Further study needs to be conducted with the CEO cohort group. Such a study might seek to find if this the first and only position the CEO has held as the top administrator in a school district. Was the CEO developed from within the system and hired because of that development? What communication system is in place that is working for the CEO that it can be given less importance as an area of support and development?

Third, the superintendents' group and the CEO cohort differed in the importance of Board/Superintendent relationships. Superintendents had a mean average of 2.08, thus, indicating the importance of this relationship. This is not surprising given that 14.6 percent of superintendents nationwide indicated that a conflict with school board precipitated a move to another district. In fact, 24.8 percent of superintendents in the smallest districts nationwide indicated they had left because of board conflict (Glass, 2000).

CEO's appeared to be concerned to a lesser extent with board/superintendent relations. Further study needs to be completed to indicate accurately why CEO's felt the relationship with their boards was of lesser importance than the superintendents had indicated. Much of the reason may lie in the fact that many CEO's indicated they had been specifically selected for the position out of the community. When asked what attracted them to the CEO position, several replied in this vein, "Opportunity to help out the school board," and "I wanted the responsibility and the board requested that I accept the job." These responses indicate a sense of community/board cohesion that most superintendents don't experience since, by-and-large, they are hired outside of the community and only take up residence in the community when their job commences.

The last area of discrepancy between the two groups was their viewpoints of the importance of state mandates. The CEO cohort had a 2.10 mean on this question while the superintendents' group had a mean of 1.81. CEO's returning the survey indicated a much higher level of frustration with the amount of paperwork and state mandates than did the superintendents. This would indicate that superintendents were more aware of and comfortable with the paperwork of the head district administrator. Further study would be needed to determine if superintendents' acceptance of the paperwork was because of training for the position. or having served in the position for a number of years.

Table 2.

Importance of Professional Areas in Daily Management

Area of Support & Professional Development	Superintendents (Average)	CEO's (Average)	Difference
Supervising the Instructional Program	2.11	1.43	.68
Dealing with State Mandates	1.81	2.10	.29
Fiscal Management	2.28	2.53	.25
Effective Communication Skills	2.08	1.85	.23
Board/Superintendent Relations	2.08	1.89	.19
School Boardsmanship	1.89	1.78	.11
Developing Positive School/Community relationships	2.18	2.10	.08
Dealing with Federal Mandates	1.65	1.57	.08
Stress Management	1.61	1.67	.06
Improving Student Performance	2.52	2.46	.06
Strategic Planning	2.06	2.07	.01
Understanding and Dealing with Special Education Issues	1.90	1.89	.01

CEO Plans for the Future

Of the twenty-nine CEO's that answered the survey, the question, "Do you plan to pursue a traditional superintendent's certificate?" brought these responses: Two replied they were only seeking the hours necessary for the superintendent's endorsement: Seventeen indicated they wanted to get a specialist degree in educational administration; and Ten stated they had no desire to become certified as superintendents.

Of those replying "No" to seeking the superintendent's endorsement, the reasons given were most often that they were close to retirement or had come out of retirement to help the district out because of a lack of candidates.

If respondents indicated their desire to seek a superintendent's certificate (now requiring a specialist

degree in educational administration), a question was asked about the greatest barriers they perceived in achieving such a degree or certificate. The CEO's identified three major barriers to getting an advanced degree:

1. Time (38% identified this factor), followed by the statement that it was impossible for them to pursue a traditional degree because they were fully employed, and the time crunch was a significant issue.
2. Distance/Location (28%) was often coupled with the time factor. Distance from a university that could offer the program was a significant barrier.
3. Money (14%) appeared to be of lesser

significance that the first two, and was usually accompanied by the explanation that such a degree would be expensive as well as time consuming.

Into the Future

Like much of the nation, South Dakota is experiencing a lack of qualified candidates to fill the lead administrative role. Respondents to the survey indicated that the CEO option was chosen by the board in 41 percent of the openings because certified candidates were not available. Seven CEO's were already on staff and were asked by the local board to step into the vacancy. Saving money was only acknowledged as a factor in fourteen percent of the CEO choices.

The administrative openings in South Dakota will continue to be filled by CEO's. As of April 25, 2001, the state had 29 superintendent vacancies for the 2001- 2002 school year. Twenty-two of the vacancies had been filled. Noncertified CEO's had filled seven of those. In most cases the people leaving were certified superintendents. This would indicate that South Dakota will have between 35 to 40 CEO's for the next school year.

South Dakota's approach to educational leadership needs to be monitored and studied for long term effects. What effect will the lack of advanced training have on local school systems in the long term? Will the gap in viewpoint between trained superintendents and CEO's widen in the areas identified in this study? Does advanced training or the lack of it in leadership make a difference in school district climate and culture over an extended period of time? Will there be a difference in student achievement levels due to the influences of trained and untrained leadership? Will

there be a difference in staff development and teacher satisfaction based upon whether the district is led by a superintendent or CEO? These and other issues could have an impact on other state legislatures and rule making authorities.

Conclusion

This study sought to shed light on the CEO option that many school districts in South Dakota are currently using. Because the option is gaining in popularity an effort was made to identify the types of support and professional development needed by CEO's. Results of the survey conducted indicate that the CEO option is often a "rural" issue because schools indicated the option was selected because of a lack of qualified applicants. Many of the demographics that have contributed to the increase in CEO's in South Dakota are also present in other rural states. Therefore, educational practitioners need to become aware of South Dakota's CEO model and consider the implications of such a model being used in their state.

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