OUTSIDERS AS SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS IN CONNECTICUT: USING CASE STUDIES TO DISCOVER WHETHER NONEDUCATORS CAN BECOME EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
OF FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

NEW YORK
2004

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FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

Graduate School of Education

This dissertation prepared under my direction by

Michael James Lagas

entitled

Outsiders as School Business Officials in Connecticut: Can Noneducators Become Educational Leaders?

has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of EdD

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4/19/04

Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not have been possible without assistance from members of the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials. Members of the administration and staff at New Canaan public schools provided experience, encouragement, and support, particularly Dr. Gary Richards, Dr. Elizabeth Feser, and Cheryl Stolba.

DEDICATION

This effort is dedicated to Maureen, Joyce, and Doris Lagas, who encouraged, edited, transcribed, and, most of all, endured throughout the process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Citing the requirement to remain globally competitive, prominent individuals from multiple organizations within the United States' economy advocate operating the nation's public schools, specifically those in prekindergarten through 12th grade (PK-12) school districts, in a manner similar to the way private sector executives run their businesses. In Connecticut, the certification process for school business administrators permits individuals who have no prior experience or college credit in the field of education to become certified to perform the business-related leadership functions in a PK-12 school district. Thus, concluding that an individual trained and experienced only in the processes of the private sector would make a discernibly different contribution, when compared with someone who did not have private sector experience, as a leader in a public school district in Connecticut was both possible

and logical. The purpose of this research was to explore the validity of this hypothesis by examining the constituents' perceptions of their school district's business administrator's leadership skills as demonstrated through his or her on-the-job performance of assigned responsibilities. Throughout this research, other administrators within the same school district, for example school principals and district-level administrators, were considered to be the school business administrators' constituents.

The Case for Running Schools Like Businesses

Advice for operating the nation's public schools comes from many sources within the economy. Kearns, former chief executive officer of Xerox and deputy secretary of education in the George H. Bush administration, stated, "Lockstep myopic management is still the norm in American education today, just as it was in American business while the Japanese were relentlessly taking over market share after market share in industry after industry" (Gelberg, 1997, p. 126). IBM's former chairman and chief executive officer, Louis V. Gerstner, Jr. established improving public education

as a corporate cause (Gerstner, Semerad, Doyle, & Johnston 1995). He contended that the proven strategies businesses have developed to deal with change and to manage both large and small organizations are "missing from the language of and practice of American public education" (p. 15). House (1998) stated that "[t]he market forces of advanced capitalism work to increase the efficiency and productivity of all institutions, as they have done in agriculture and automobile manufacture. It may well be education's turn for economic rationalization" (p. 10). Schlechty theorized that "School leaders, like business leaders, must come to understand that if America's schools are to meet the needs of the 21st century, then--like America's corporate structure--they must be reinvented" (Gelberg, 1997, p. 127). Synthesizing these citations, one concludes that schools risked stagnation by not adapting to the rigors of competitive markets.

While Kearns, Gerstner, House, and Schlechty stressed the discipline of competitive markets as a goal for education, Deal and Peterson (1999) emphasized that public education should develop a shared culture that emulates the human side of successful private sector

organizations (p. 11). Bauman (1996) offered a corroborating commentary: "Educational administration is organized around many of the same principles that are applied to managing private sector organizations. The administrative profession defines schools in bureaucratic terms; educational environments need managing, with clear rules and rational procedures designed for order and efficiency" (pp. 99-100). Barbara Healy, a national marketing director for MetLife, similarly supported this opinion from a private sector perspective: "schools can and must be run in a business-like way, with adherence to good business practices" (Tharpe, 1997, p. 16). These writers proposed that educators adopt the culture and practices of private sector organizations.

At least as early as 1986, educational researchers advocated running schools like businesses. Jordan and Webb (1986) wrote in the *Educational Administration Quarterly* that public and private sector business practices could be adapted and transferred to education without impacting the instructional programs. While the opinions of business and education leaders varied slightly, consensus existed that public education would benefit from employing the discipline, processes, and

culture of private sector organizations. To understand how these disciplines, processes, practices, and culture can be transferred to public education, it is important to examine what role a school business administrator plays in a public school district.

The Role of a School Business Administrator

In the United States, operating public schools costs more than $300 billion annually, and these schools employ more than 1 million people. Because of these two factors, education ranks as the nation's largest public entity and is frequently compared with the private sector (Meglis, 1998, p. 15). McLaughlin and Norman (1995) wrote, "In reality, education has been an industry for most of this [20th] century. Until recently the politics and the economy of the country have not needed to challenge it and open it up to more market forces" (p. 11). A frequent writer on the subject of school business administration, Dierdorff (1994) indicated that despite the substantial expenditure of funds and the need for higher levels of public accountability, few programs to train school business administrators existed, and there was no standardization among the existing programs.

School business administrators manage many of the noninstructional functions associated with operating a school district. Stevenson and Tharpe (1999) from the Association of School Business Officials International characterized the school business administrator position as follows:

> Obviously, the task of administering this vastly complex business of education requires professional leadership that is highly skilled and knowledgeable. One of the most vital members of the modern educational leadership team is the professional school business administrator. This person is often at the heart of the administration and management of one of the largest corporate endeavors in a community. (p. 1)

Recognizing that the district-level support components are critical to the success of the educational programs, modern school districts charge the school business administrator with leading some or all of these functions: accounting, auditing, budgeting, cash management, payroll, business office management, student activity funds, purchasing, facilities and maintenance, physical site security, construction management, information services, food service, insurance and risk management, fixed assets and inventory control, warehousing, investments, legal issues, personnel management and contract negotiations, managing historical

records, student transportation, and other related support functions (Meglis, 1998; p. 108, Stevenson & Tharpe, 1999, pp. 17-18). To borrow a term from the private sector, school business administrators could be referred to as the "chief financial officers" of school districts because they manage similarly large operational business functions (Stevenson & Tharpe, p. 6).

> The job is complex and requires both educational and business knowledge to be successful. The key to success is not so much how expertise is attained, but that the school business administrator has knowledge and understanding in both educational and business matters. (p. 58)

Because of the breadth of the school business administrator's responsibilities, finding qualified candidates for the position becomes important. Some states have instituted a certification process with the intention of improving the quality of the candidate pool.

State-Mandated Certification

Describing the essential requirements of the school business administrator's job, Dierdorff (1994) indicated that the position "[demanded] a system of integrating and balancing management, personal values, the environment and politics, while applying a multitude of more specialized skills and broader knowledge. School

business administration is a very challenging profession" (p. 24). Because the requirements of the job are so demanding and in order to promote professional excellence, an increasing number of states mandate that school business administrators attain state certification prior to their employment. Interestingly, not all states regarded pre-employment certification as a potential method of promoting professional excellence. Everett and Mastro (1994) noted the prevalent objection to mandating certification, "a certificate does not guarantee a level of performance. In fact, it guarantees nothing except that the individual has collected a required number of hours and maybe some field related experiences" (p. 15). However, Connecticut is one state that does require certification for school business administrators. School business administrators in Connecticut were the focus of the research in this study, which is subsequently explained in more detail.

The state-mandated certification process for school business administrators in Connecticut created an opportunity for this researcher to investigate the post-certification leadership skills and on-the-job performance of individuals who had no previous experience

in education. One of the four paths for certification as a school business administrator, as indicated in Section 10-145d-588 paragraph (d) of the State of Connecticut Department of Education (2000b) regulations, required that candidates:

> must hold a bachelor's degree from an approved institution and have at least three (3) years of work experience in either the public or private sector where the responsibilities included work in at least six (6) of the following 11 areas: accounting and reporting, financial planning and budgeting, operation and maintenance of plant, administering personnel functions, purchasing and supply management, data processing, food service operations, grant applications and reporting, insurance, collective bargaining, and transportation. (p. 158)

Thus, it is possible to be certified for employment as a school business administrator without prior experience in education or college credit in education. Consequently, it was also possible to investigate the leadership skills and performance of individuals who had taken this path to certification.

In the 1999 book, *The School Business Administrator*, published by the Association of School Business Officials International, Stevenson and Tharpe (1999) stated, "School business administrators must be trained and experienced in the field of education with emphasis on

school business administration or trained and experienced in various phases of business with a knowledge of education" (p. vii) because the training and experience were vital to the operation and concept of the school system. Thus, the acknowledged international association's position on the preparation and experience required to be a school business administrator seems to contradict one of Connecticut's certification paths for school business administrators. However, there does not appear to be an accepted opinion on the subject of the school business administrator's background and experience. Indeed, Sielke (1995) noted that:

> The debate continues as to whether the business administrator should be someone from business, such as an accountant, or whether the business administrator should be an educator who learns accounting. The background of the individual may affect his/her duties and relationship with the rest of the administrative staff. . . . Regardless of the business administrator's background, knowledge of both the instructional and non-instructional components of the school district are essential. (pp. 34, 37)

The lack of an accepted view presented an opportunity for additional research.

Previous Research and Existing Materials

In contrasting the amount of research that was available regarding instructional leadership in public school districts with the research regarding school business administration, Snyder (1994) indicated that the latter was sparse. There was one limited study that was particularly relevant to this research. D. T. Murphy (1997) studied school business administrators in New York who had come from outside education. He conducted structured telephone interviews with 21 school business administrators. These administrators thought that they definitely made positive contributions to their school districts by applying their business skills, particularly in accounting, banking, budgeting, and finance. However, these individuals also encountered some unexpected difficulties after moving into jobs in public education: internal politics, union-management politics, resistance to change, slower decision making, learning about state aid, and answering to the public at board of education meetings. One respondent commented, "The board welcomed someone from the outside because they were having fiscal and organizational problems, but they still considered me an outsider" (pp. 36-37). Thus, there were mixed

reactions to noneducators serving as school business administrators.

However, as with all of the other studies in this area that this researcher found, the respondents to this survey were school business administrators themselves. These reactions and comments were self-perceptions. Neither Murphy's survey, nor the others that the researcher reviewed, considered the reactions and opinions of the individuals to whom the school business administrator provided business-related services and support (i.e., the constituents).

The previously cited representatives of the Association of School Business Officials International, Stevenson and Tharpe (1999), listed the "team concept" and the "service concept" as the foundations of effective management and operation by which school business administrators should conduct themselves within their school districts. The "team concept" stipulates that the school business administrator is an integral part of a district team that provides quality education to its students through managing resources; caring for facilities; and offering efficient transportation, food service, and other vital support functions (p. 4).

Buchanan (1995) described building viable partnerships with other school administrators as the most important consideration for school business administrators. Therefore, productive and professional relationships with other team members, particularly district office administrators and school principals, can be seen as necessities for an effective school business administrator.

The "service concept" advanced the idea that the school business administrator's organizational function exists solely to facilitate the school district's educational program (Stevenson & Tharpe, 1999, p. 5). In this vein, Uebbing and Kerwin (1997) acknowledged the importance of the school business administrator's role on the instructional team as being the facilitator of good instructional practices. When providing support services within the school district, the school business administrator must interact with other administrators. Consequently, the other instructional team administrators were well suited to evaluate the school business administrator's effectiveness as a school district leader.

Kotter (1990) described leadership as effective "when it moves people to a place in which both they and those who depend on them are genuinely better off, and when it does so without trampling on the rights of others" (p. 5). Noted authors on the subject of leadership, Kouzes and Posner (1995) "define[d] leadership as the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (p. 30). They shared the idea that the leader's constituents are those whose opinions truly matter when evaluating effective leadership:

> The portrait of leadership that emerges from both the personal-best cases and the survey of constituents' expectations is a study in relationships. Without constituents to enlist, a prospective leader is all alone. Taking no one anywhere. Without leaders, constituents have no energizer to ignite their passions, no exemplar to follow, no compass by which to be guided. Essential to the definition of leadership is an understanding of this relationship. (p. 30)

In their earlier work about leadership, Kouzes and Posner (1993) emphasized that the relationship between a leader and his or her constituents is based on mutual needs and interests, which require a sound understanding of the service relationship (p. 11). They also posited that "[t]here is a greater connection between leadership and

customer service than there is between leadership and traditional management" (p. 10). Thus, in order to have thoroughly evaluated a school business administrator's effectiveness as a leader, a researcher must have considered the opinions of the leader's constituents, that is, within the school district those whom the leader served.

Description of Research

Figure 1 below graphically depicts the framework of this research.

For at least the past 20 years, under the umbrella of improving the nation's economic competitiveness, critics of public education chided school districts to improve the performance of their students and graduates. School district administrators continued to feel pressure to improve students' standardized test scores and generally to reduce the cost of education. The common theme of the frequent critiques has been that schools should be run like business. Researchers have conducted numerous studies of activities related to instruction, but there have been a limited number of studies of support service activities, where school district

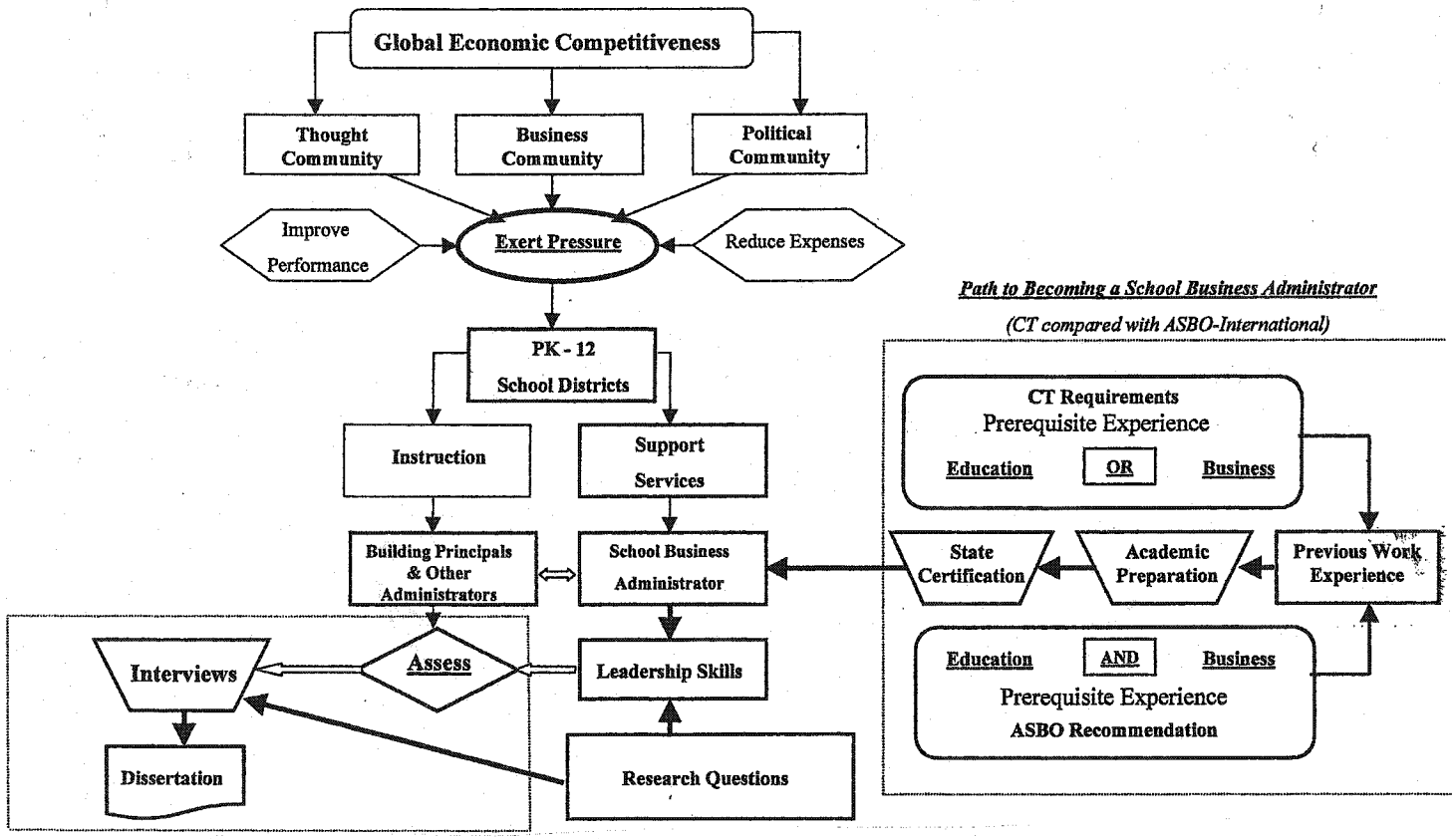

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of research

operations most resemble a business enterprise. An anomaly in the certification process for school business administrators in Connecticut permitted this researcher to explore the impact that an individual trained in the business processes from the private sector had on the operation of a school district.

The box in the lower right corner of Figure 1 shows that the paths that a candidate could pursue to become a school business administrator in Connecticut do not necessarily require experience in the field of education. Note the use of the word "OR" when describing prerequisite experience. The researcher's investigation revealed that three of Connecticut's four paths to certification as a school business administrator require either college-level credit in education or some combination of college-level credit with previous work experience in either the public or private sector. One of Connecticut's paths does not require previous experience or college-level credit in education and was the key focus of this research. This box also depicts the recommendation of the Association of School Business Officials-International that school business administrators should have experience in both education

and business. Note the use of the word "AND" indicating both education and business experience.

The box in the lower left corner of Figure 1 depicts that this researcher interviewed building principals and other administrators in order to obtain and assess their opinions of the leadership skills of consecutive school business administrators in their respective school districts. The primary criterion for including a school district in the study was the requirement that successive school business administrators had business-only followed by education-plus-business backgrounds or vice versa.

Scope of Study

Merriam (1998) stated that "Case study research in education is conducted so that specific issues and problems of practice can be identified and explained" (p. 34). Confirming the identifying and explanatory roles, Yin (1994) recommended that when "how" and "why" questions were asked about a contemporary situation over which the researcher could exert little control, the case study was the most advantageous research strategy. Having identified the issue that school business administrators can be certified by the State of

Connecticut and appointed to positions in the state's school districts directly from the private sector, this researcher focused on constituents' explanations of "if," "how," and "why" the leadership skills of those with only private sector experience differed from other school business administrators who had prior experience in education.

The researcher selected four Connecticut school districts as cases for study. The two key selection criteria for selecting a school district were: (a) consecutive business administrators in each school district must have come from the private sector and from the field of education or vice versa, and (b) any constituents who could be interviewed must have served in the district with both business administrators that allowed inclusion based on the first criterion. The researcher used a series of semistructured interviews to ascertain constituents' or insiders' views, known as the "emic" perspective, regarding consecutive school business administrators' leadership skills in their respective districts. Merriam (1998) defines semistructured interviews in the following manner:

> Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a highly structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic. (p. 74)

Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996, p. 309) described the general interview guide approach as outlining a set of topics to be explored with each respondent without having a predetermined order or wording to the interview questions. The goal of the semistructured interview was to see which explanations emerged regarding differences in leadership skills of the respective school business administrators.

Problem Definition

As previously indicated, the State of Connecticut does not require that school business administrators have any experience or college credit in the field of education prior to becoming certified. Connecticut has four paths for certification as a school business administrator. Three paths require prior experience in a public school district, college credit in education, or both. One path permits certification of an individual

with at least 3 years of work experience in the private sector or another public sector position, with the proviso that the individual has had experience in 6 of 11 categories of responsibility. Examples of the prior experience that noneducators have had include corporate positions, military careers, and other State of Connecticut governmental jobs.

Analyzing the effect of noneducational experience on a school business administrator's on-the-job performance allowed for defining a research problem. In other words, do other district administrators, the constituents, perceive any difference in the leadership skills of those school business administrators who lack the experience or college credit in education? Do constituent administrators perceive that a business administrator's background makes any difference in his or her on-the-job performance? If so, what are the differences?

Research Questions

To explore the problem, this researcher posed the following general research questions about the two consecutive school business administrators who were the focus of the study in the respective school districts:

1. What are the desired attributes (i.e., training, experience, or personal traits) that a school business administrator should have?

2. Why are the desired attributes indicated in question 1 important?

3. Is the interaction between the school district's business administrator and the other administrators in the office essential to the smooth day-to-day operation of the school district?

4. Does the school business administrator's role within the district's organization have educational importance?

5. Does the presence or absence of the desired attributes in the school business administrator affect other district and school level administrators' capabilities to perform their duties? If so, in what ways?

6. Could someone who did not have a background in education but wanted to become a school business administrator provide the desired attributes?

Significance of Study

Many people in a school district's organization are interested in the backgrounds and experience of school business administrators. Superintendents of schools face the difficult task of finding talented people to provide effective financial leadership for the support functions in their school districts. Boards of education seek school business administrators whose experience and qualifications are compatible with the board's policies. State departments of education need to consider how the certification process affects the supply of qualified candidates for school business administrator positions. Schools of Education seek opportunities to provide a flow of competent individuals for positions in school districts. People who are considering becoming a school business administrator want to know what training and experience is necessary to become an effective leader. With all of the above considerations, the essential question was: Did the school business administrator's experience and training make any difference to the constituent administrators whom he or she supported?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Analyzing all literature published on the broad subject of school business administration seemed to present an overwhelming challenge. To make the review manageable, to give it structure, and to directly consider the research questions, this investigation examined seven topical areas:

1. Operating public schools differently, like a business,

2. School business administrators and the functions they perform,

3. The supply and demand for school business administrators,

4. Certification requirements for school business administrators in states bordering Connecticut,

5. Relevant research on the topic of school business administration,

6. Peer review as a method for evaluating an individual's job contribution and performance, and

7. Leadership in general and as it pertains to school districts.

The Educational Resources Information Center's (ERIC) computerized databases provided the predominant tool for searching for relevant publications. Having selected applicable material through ERIC, the researcher expanded the pool of literature to be reviewed by further including additional texts and documentation from the State of Connecticut and surrounding states. Consequently, the combination of information that was reviewed was representative, but it should not be considered exhaustive.

The Association of School Business Officials-International (ASBO) provides programs and services to promote high standards of school business management, professional growth, and the effective use of educational resources among its members. ASBO's members include school business supervisors and administrators from all levels of public and private schools, including junior and community colleges.

> For over 70 years, the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) has served as the professional organization for school business administration personnel. During its entire existence, and especially during recent years, the association has devoted considerable attention to the development of the profession of school business administration through annual conferences and a series of publications. (Jordan & Webb, 1986, p. 176)

Thus, the dominant literary source of information throughout this chapter was the ASBO's publication, *School Business Affairs*, the principal professional journal in the field. It would be difficult to do any research relating to school business administration without considering ASBO's programs and services.

Included in a 1987 interview by Allen (1987), then the Executive Director of ASBO, noted futurist John Naisbitt described the nation's educational systems as a dark cloud on the horizon. Allen quoted Naisbitt thusly: "We are getting an increasingly inferior product from our schools and that's affecting our products and our economy. . . . Improving our educational systems is not only socially critical, it's also economically critical in this competitive global information economy" (p. 46). Naisbitt emphasized the importance of a sufficient supply of productive workers for the nation to compete globally,

and he pointed out that businesses spend more on education and training than school systems spend (p. 47). Naisbitt saw competition as the answer: "I think we ought to take the budgets away from the schools and give the money instead to the parents in the form of vouchers. Then, the schools could compete for those vouchers on the basis of not only quality but also subject interest" (p. 48). While 1987 was not just yesterday, Naisbitt was reasonably accurate in predicting a movement to run school districts differently--like businesses. Naisbitt concluded his interview with Allen with the following prediction: "A lot of changes will occur in the workplace and in society as we move from a workplace designed for the industrial period to a workplace for, or growing out of, the information society" (p. 50). Adapting to changes in the workplace was a challenge in the 1990s and continues into the new millennium for business as well as for education.

Operating Public Schools Differently

Education as an Industry

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published a report, *A Nation at Risk* that

shattered or confirmed many opinions about the status of the nation's public education system, depending upon one's perspective. Following the report's publication (Bauman, 1996), many elected public officials became more involved in school improvement through policy-driven remedies and reforms, such as raising standards, improving teaching, and requiring more rigorous curricula. The involvement of high-level political officials attracted other interest groups, but particularly the business community. For example, in 1995 IBM's former chairman and chief executive officer, Gerstner (Gerstner et al., 1995) offered the following series of comments regarding public schools in his book, *Reinventing Education*:

> [T]oo often we find our schools resistant to change and rooted, not in the current century, but in the last (p. xi).
>
> It is important to recognize that the current school system was designed over 150 years ago and supported this nation's extraordinarily successful industrial era very well. The problem is not with the concept but with the fact that in its current highly regulated and process-oriented form, mass public education no longer works. (p. xiv)
>
> No society can be so wealthy as to afford poverty in its midst. Education in the modern economy is the engine of growth and prosperity. We look to an educated workforce not to benefit

> just business but to benefit all Americans. (p. xv)
>
> Unlike businesses that are periodically forced to respond to new technologies, new demands from their markets, or the obsolescence of products, no external forces have demanded that schools change. (p. 11)
>
> From a business perspective, then, the central problem for American public schools is that they have not been forced to continuously adapt themselves to the changes in their students and the demands of society and the economy. Operating outside the market, they have been insulated from the necessity to change. (p. 15)

Similar to Naisbitt, Gerstner et al. (1995) suggested that the discipline of the marketplace--the interplay of supply and demand--was the key to successfully operating public schools. He recommended accountability through deregulating schools, measuring them against high performance standards, and penalizing them for failing to meet the standards (p. 21). He concluded that "with the one exception of public elementary and secondary schools, markets are the rule in the learned professions: medicine, law, accounting, architecture, places of worship" (p. 27).

Sowell (1993), a researcher who specializes in social and economic policy for the Hoover Institution,

addressed market dynamics in education from a different perspective when he stated,

> Teachers' unions do not represent teachers in the abstract. They represent such teachers as actually exist in today's public schools. These teachers have every reason to fear the competition of other college graduates for jobs, to fear any weakening of iron-clad tenure rules, and to fear any form of competition between schools that would allow parents to choose where to send their children to school. Competition means winners and losers--based on performance, rather than seniority or credentials. (p. 27)

Sowell concluded that the imperfect markets for employing educators were a causal factor for education's poor performance. His conclusion emphasized the importance of being able to understand supply and demand issues.

If one accepts the viewpoints of Naisbitt, Gerstner, and Sowell, which stressed the importance of understanding market dynamics, he also could logically conclude that a school business administrator who had previous professional experience with market dynamics would also make a significant contribution to leading the business-related aspects of public education, perhaps an even greater contribution than another school business administrator who lacked such professional experience.

Emphasizing the economic importance of education, McLaughlin and Norman (1995) stated that, "Industrial

America is far ahead of education recasting its abilities to survive in a world growing ever more competitive and with decreasing tolerance for obsolescence in thinking, products or services" (p. 12). McLaughlin and Norman further concluded that education was the second largest economic endeavor in the nation with approximately 50% of each state's operating budget devoted to it funding. Healy, a national marketing director for MetLife, supported McLaughlin's notion when she noted that the education marketplace was one of the most important components of the nonprofit sector in the nation's economy (Tharpe, 1997, p. 15). Referencing a statement by Albert Shanker, the head of the American Federation of Teachers in 1992, McLaughlin and Norman noted that while education was regarded as an industry, it did not run on an industrial model. He concluded that school business administrators have a unique perspective on the changes to both education and business because their working environment spans both sectors of the economy. Healy concurred with McLaughlin's viewpoint: "School business officials [administrators] are seen in somewhat of a different light. They may even have more credibility in the minds of the general public because they aren't seen

as educators per se" (Tharpe, p. 15). Thus, school business administrators have an unrivaled position as school district leaders. These individuals must support their school district's educational purposes by focusing on business-related challenges.

Dissenting Viewpoints--"The Contrarians"

Although the continuing debate among policymakers, business leaders, educators, and concerned others regarding the performance of the nation's public schools was not a theme of this dissertation, recognizing that there were well-respected educators who contested the business leaders' and others' reasons for denouncing public schools was at least tangentially relevant to the research. For example, Berliner (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) from Arizona State University objected to the notion that schools do not produce technically competent workers: "The evidence suggests that technical skills can be trained on the job and that most industries worry more about the attitudes, motivation, and discipline of their workers" (p. 91). He further noted that businesses directed two thirds of their training expense toward employees who already had a college degree.

Bracey (1995) contended that: "One sees that society has placed every important social problem on the schoolhouse doorstep and then reacted in anger and horror when the school's inhabitants have failed to, by themselves, solve the problem, whatever it might be" (p. 11). Bracey also noted that education's performance throughout the last century has never been good enough for society, regardless of how well schools have been performing (p. 77). Berliner, Bracey, and others are members of an informal group that has been called the "contrarians" because these writers and scholars "provide a view contrary to the one found in the popular press or emanating from the lips of many of our political and economic leaders" (Houston, 1996, p. 11). Finding a common ground between the proponents of deploying competitive business processes in public schools and the educators who analyze noneducators' commentary was not the purpose of this research. Whether or not one agrees that the public school system is in disarray, it is still possible that a school business official with only private sector experience would be a more effective leader in a school district. The purpose of the research was to determine if a school

business administrator with previous private sector experience provided stronger leadership of the business functions of a school district than one who did not have such experience.

School Business Administrator--
The Job and Its Evolution

History of the School Business Administrator Position

As early as 1692, references to administering schools were included in the laws of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Wood, Thompson, Picus, & Tharpe, 1995, p. 1-1). Indeed in the United States, the position of school business administrator predates the position of superintendent of schools (Jordan & Webb, 1986, p. 174). In 1853, the governing body of Cleveland, Ohio, hired a chief school administrator (superintendent of schools). However, in 1841 the same group had already hired an acting (school business) manager to keep accounting records, prepare the payroll, and care for school facilities. The first responsibilities of Cleveland's school business manager remain central to the position today, but the role has been expanded because of

organizational, environmental, and governmental requirements. "[T]he primary mission of school business administration is to facilitate and support the teaching/learning process" (p. 171). Broadening the context of its mission: "School business administration as a subsystem of educational administration in turn embodies activities that enable teachers, administrators, and policy makers to make the 'best' educational decisions that have business implications" (Hack, Candoli, & Ray, 1992, p. 7). The important concept is that school business administration supports the school district's educational mission.

Current analysis indicated that the titles that school business administrators held usually varied by the size and location of their districts. The titles included Associate Superintendent for Administration, Assistant Superintendent for Business, Executive Director of Support Services, as well as many derivatives of these. The Association of School Business Officials-International (ASBO) provided some important definitions of titles and distinctions among them:

> The position responsible for the wide variety of functions in a school business operation is typically designated as "school business administrator." School business administrators--sometimes called managers--have been designated by the school board and/or the superintendent to accept general responsibility for the administration of the business affairs of a school district. . . . The term "school business official" usually refers to a professional with administrative responsibility for a specific aspect of the non-instructional operation of a school system, such as food service, finance, transportation, facilities, risk management, negotiations, etc. These positions typically report through the school business administrator, to the superintendent and school board. (Stevenson & Tharpe, 1999, p. 2)

Many school districts mixed titles and functions for these jobs, so comparisons must be made carefully. Usually comparing the school business official's responsibilities provided the most accurate information.

The School Business Administrator's Responsibilities

Wood et al. (1995) listed the tasks of school business operation for which a school business administrator has general responsibility:

1. Planning--providing a database for resource allocation and unit costs to develop projections of organizational needs;

2. Organizing--assuring that appropriate procedures, staff, materials and financial resources are in place to accomplish necessary work;

3. Staffing--recruiting, hiring, training, developing and evaluating employees necessary to meet the school district's organizational goals;

4. Directing--leading and guiding subordinates toward achieving the school district's organizational goals;

5. Controlling--regulating and controlling the school district's activities through appropriate measurements, avoiding potential trouble spots, and taking corrective actions when necessary;

6. Decision making--identifying problems, evaluating potential solutions, and choosing the appropriate solution after sufficient deliberation; and

7. Evaluating--continually measuring the school district's activities against the achievement of its basic goals.

Stevenson and Tharpe (1999) added communicating to Wood's list of responsibilities. By communicating he meant sending and receiving information from employees and other sectors of the school district including the

parents and taxpayers. Stevenson and Tharpe became more specific by revising the areas of responsibility to 30 task clusters as listed in Table 1 below. Stevenson summarized as follows:

> The job of school business administrator is both complex and challenging. Job tasks are diverse and highly technical, and emerging tasks . . . make the job even more demanding. The modern school business administrator must be a highly skilled individual with exceptional communication and human relations skills. (p. 19)

With this broad range of responsibilities and large list of tasks to be performed, school business administrators require a commensurately varied set of personal characteristics and job-related skills to be effective in their jobs.

Requisite Personal Characteristics and Job-Related Skills

ASBO (Wood et al., 1995) recommended the following personal traits as desirable for school business administrators:

Should be driven and directed;

Should sincerely like people and be able to demonstrate it;

Should be able to work collegially;

Table 1

Areas of Responsibilities

Capital Fund Management	Fiscal Audits and Reports	Plant Security and Property Protection
Cash Management	Food Services	Politics at multiple levels
Classified Personnel Management	Grantsmanship	Professional Negotiations
Community Relations	Insurance and Risk Management	Property and Fixed Asset Management
Construction Management	Legal Control	Purchasing
Information Processing	Media Relations	Staff Development
Facilities Planning	Office Management	Student Activity Funds
Educational Resource Management	Payroll Management	Student Transportation Services
Financial Planning and Budgeting	Plant Maintenance	Supplies Management
Fiscal Accounting and Financial Reporting	Plant Operations	Warehousing of supplies and other materials

Should listen well;

Should have integrity;

Should deal with situations fairly;

Should establish a productive work atmosphere;

Should be a self-starter;

Should be able to withstand petty annoyances and not take himself or herself too seriously;

Should communicate well verbally and in writing;

Should be a problem solver;

Should be able to accept criticism without sulking;

Should make decisions rather than study issues; and

Should be a team leader who credits the team members rather than taking personal credit.

Interestingly, there was nothing either unique or particular about these traits. Most people who hire managers for their organizations would probably also list these personal traits as desirable for all managers in their respective organizations.

Hack et al. (1992) offered that the necessary skills for school business administrators should be considered on three levels: technical, human relations, and conceptual. Technical skills include discrete functions such as budget development, purchasing, accounting,

building maintenance, facility planning, transportation, or food services. Human relations skills are the ability to relate school business operations to other functional administrators, such as the director of special education, within the school district. The third and highest level, conceptual skills, involves participation in district-wide planning, policy development, and policy follow-through, for example, conceptualizing and executing long-range staff personnel development programs. Sielke (1995) concluded, "The levels represent a progression in the skills, knowledge and maturation of the business administrator" (p. 34). The notion of a progression or maturation of skills is important because the conceptual level requires a stronger background in education to be effective. This notion was particularly relevant to the subsequent consideration of a state-mandated minimum skill level prior to certification as a school business administrator.

State-Mandated Certification Prior to Employment

For almost 40 years the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) has advocated state

certification for school business administrators. As of this date, 24 states required professional certification for school business administrators. Representing ASBO, Wood Wood et al. (1995) summarized the organization's position on requiring certification:

> The Professional Development Research Committee of ASBO recommends that certification of the school business administrator be adopted in all states. It further recommends that provisions include professional certification standards recognizing the business background as well as the educational background. (p. 1-10)

The latter sentence is especially significant. It leaves at least an opening that a background in the private sector has some value for state-certified school business administrators. Earlier, Drake (1990) had written in *School Business Affairs* that

> Most states leave the educational and experiential requirements for the school business officials [administrators] to the discretion of the local boards of education. . . . If the local districts [boards of education] will hire only those persons qualifying for educational administrative certificates/licenses, then some educational and experiential background in the field of education is assumed. (p. 19)

Stevenson and Tharpe (1999) reiterated ASBO's position regarding mandatory certification: "Some states and districts require that the school business administrator be certified and/or registered. The intent is to assure

districts that they are hiring candidates with at least the basic fundamental knowledge required to administer the business function of a school district" (p. 59). Meglis (1998) rhetorically pondered, "Some educational subdivisions mandate certification while others have no such requirement. Do you know of any other professional staff member that does not have to be certified?" (p. 101). Thus, those individuals who were tightly connected to the international organization, ASBO, were proponents of state-mandated certification for school business administrators.

As an example (Wall, 1990) of mandated certification, the State of North Carolina established requirements for school business administrators in 1975, but it took 11 years to fully implement the procedures. In conjunction with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, school business administrators received more formal training in school operations. Additional individuals were certified as school business administrators or as school finance officers. As a result, the state's Board of Education cited more timely and improved financial reporting by school units (districts). Several of the school units consistently

received ASBO's Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting. North Carolina's results were certainly commendable; the State did not enforce any preservice requirements in the field of education. The State provided instruction in the field of education via minicourses.

Acting in the capacity of chairman of ASBO's professional development committee, Dierdorff (1988) stated,

> Certification provides benefits to all parties involved. Employers benefit by increased odds in finding qualified employees. Although enhanced position and status are not guaranteed, certified candidates gain a competitive edge over the noncertified for positions and, as an added benefit, gain a clear picture of the job. (p. 13)

One could logically conclude from the previous statement and from ASBO's continued advocacy of mandatory certification for school business administrators in all states that the education hierarchy had the opportunity to exercise monopolistic control. By coupling mandatory certification with a requirement for background experience in the field of education, the education hierarchy controlled both the demand for and the supply of school business administrators. Perhaps this condition negated a broader acceptance of mandatory

certification by more states. Regardless, supply and demand constraints continued to exist in many states because the functions of public education and school business administrator's position became broader.

Changing Requirements Faced by Public School Districts

Bracey (1995), commenting on the past 200 years of public education, stated "that whenever faced with a large national problem, the United States has always turned to its schools [for a solution]" (p. 19). Conversely, Sowell (1993) discussed the problematic issues that schools faced: "The attempts of schools and colleges to encompass far more than they can handle are an important part of the reason why they are handling education so poorly" (p. 18). Despite opposing perspectives, both authors saw the changing composition of school districts' workloads as an important issue.

Stevenson and Warren (1996), Stevenson and Tharpe (1999), Meglis (1998), Malone (1998), and Berliner and Biddle (1996) categorized the nine most relevant factors as follows:

Aging population--Individuals born immediately after the end of World War II, known as "baby boomers," began to reach 50 years of age in 1996. They have been described as a self-centered generation focused on personal needs. The authors saw them as reluctant to pay taxes for schools when health care was a more pressing problem. Assuming the observation was accurate and the trend continues, school districts would be forced to seek additional alternatives for funding public education, for example, allowing corporations to sponsor district athletic facilities for a fee.

Multicultural society--Minority groups continue to be the fastest growing segment of the population, resulting in a varied composition of public schools' student bodies. Public schools must adapt to the multiple languages that the students speak and to the multiple cultures from which the students come.

Poverty--The distribution of wealth in the United States is less even than in other Western nations. A child who is born today is six times more likely to live in poverty than is someone who is 65 or older. Students from families who are homeless continue to increase. The number of children from single-parent homes, where the

teenaged mother used drugs or alcohol during pregnancy, is a continued source of concern. The result is that many students enter today's public school system less prepared than they could be as they begin and progress through their education. The cost of compensating for the diminished educational readiness of many students continues to escalate, particularly in urban areas.

Prejudice and discrimination--Despite federal legislation (Civil Rights Act of 1964) barring discrimination based upon race, among other criteria, many African Americans remain the victims of prejudice, ethnic stereotyping, and discrimination. For example, affluent White families, in some cases, abandon urban school systems for suburban systems to avoid racially integrated schools. The flight of White families left the urban schools for the poor and stigmatized minorities. As another example, a White student is more than three times more likely to be assigned to a gifted class than a Black student is. The costs associated with prejudice and discrimination might be considered indiscernible, but the effects continue to be real. School business administrators must be knowledgeable of

the services required to address underserved segments of the public school population.

Funding issues--Governors, legislators, political action committees, and the taxpaying public continue to seek ways to reduce expenditures for public education and to preclude real estate taxes as the primary source of funds. Garnering widespread support for increased tax levies or additional bond referenda continues to be problematic.

Decentralization of control--The 1990s saw a growing trend by school districts, particularly larger ones, to push decision-making authority and responsibility back to the administrators and other leaders in the individual schools. This concept has become known as site-based management. In districts where site-based management has become an accepted policy, the school business administrator's function changed to that of a teacher or counselor to principals who grappled with problems concerning budgeting, law, personnel, accounting, and freedom of information.

Violence prevention--Prior to the 1990s, many people believed that incidences of school violence were largely compartmentalized in urban ghettoes. This belief

permitted middle- and upper-class Americans to effectively ignore its existence. Particularly in the second half of the last decade, school violence also increased in suburban school districts. Affluent school districts were not spared from extremely violent incidents. Siphoning funds from instructional programs to establish prevention programs and to support terrified and grieving students and staff has become increasingly accepted as an appropriate use for already limited school funds.

Alternatives to and within public education--In the past decade, there has been more frequent use of the word *choice* pertaining to public education. There have been and continue to be attempts at privatizing public education--contracting with a private organization to operate public schools within a particular school district, such as in Hartford, Connecticut, and Baltimore, Maryland. Offering vouchers to families that can be used to pay partially or augment tuition expenses at a private school received continued support both operationally and politically. In many parts of the United States, charter schools that operate as part of the public school system but are independent of many of

the local and state educational policies, and magnet schools that emphasize an educational theme such as mathematics or science within a given school district, received broader support and acceptance. Allowing parents to choose the alternative for providing public education for their children offers unanticipated and unknown challenges for the school business administrator and all administrators in the school district, too.

Technology and telecommunications explosion--Computers and enhanced telecommunications have dramatically changed the private sector, government, nonprofit organizations and education at all levels. Today's students, teachers, and staff have access to an unprecedented number of sources of information directly from the keyboards at their personal computers. Distributing computer access equitably continues to be a significant challenge for American educators. The gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" has never been so apparent as it is with the uneven distribution of personal computers in the nation's public schools. Many respected authorities saw increasing the number of personal computers in public schools as the solution. However, the school business administrator who sees

access to information as the opportunity also sees another, perhaps more difficult, challenge: Access to more information requires that teachers and students change their methods of teaching and learning. Tapscott (1996) stated:

> An education system that fully integrates the information highway would be much better equipped to keep pace with the accelerating growth in knowledge or advances in technology that are occurring in almost every field. The job of classroom teachers will become more like that of a coach. They won't have to handle rote learning, so they'll have time for mentoring, advice, and one-on-one--one teacher, one student. The highway would also be the best tool to enable graduates to continue the learning process once they have left school. (p. 207)

For Tapscott, failing to keep pace with technological change would be a critical error for school districts. In his book, *The Road Ahead*, Microsoft's chairman, Gates (1995), suggested some policy concerns for educators:

> Having students connected directly to limitless information and to each other will raise policy questions for schools and for society at large. . . . Will students routinely be allowed to bring their portable PCs with them into every classroom? . . . Should they have access to information that their parents find objectionable on moral, social, or political grounds? Be allowed to do homework for an unrelated class? . . . Should the teacher be able to monitor what is on every student's screen or to record it for later spot-checking? (p. 204)

Personal computer and telecommunication technologies have the potential to fundamentally change the way teachers teach and students learn. Deploying these technologies equitably has become the immediate problem, but adapting them to enhance education remains a significant concern for school business officials.

School business administrators will continue to perform their jobs in an environment characterized by ambiguity, changing politics, cultural diversity, self-centeredness, social change, financial scrutiny, and technological progress. They must continually adapt to instability and constant change.

Changing Role of the School Business Administrator

Sielke (1995) concluded that the greater demands to educate the nation's children and the public's reluctance to support increasing costs for education were the two biggest issues facing school business administrators. Her conclusion was consistent with the changes facing school districts that were described in the previous section. As a result of the changing organizational structure, Sielke posited that school business

administrators' skills must concurrently progress along a continuum. In the past, establishing technical proficiency in financial areas such as accounting or budgeting served a school business administrator well. She analyzed the emphasis on financial prowess thusly:

> Unfortunately, many school district administrators view the school business administrator as the official bean counter or the number cruncher of the district. . . . And, too often, the business administrator views the instructional personnel as people who have no understanding of why receipts and purchase orders are necessary. (p. 34)

Sielke, like Hack et al. (1992), saw the need for two additional sets of skills, human relations skills and conceptual skills. The school business administrator must adapt to functioning as a member of an administrative team, that is, invoking his or her human relations skills. Supporting Sielke's conclusion, Buchanan (1995) wrote, "School business operations have become less a series of 'dictums from on high' and much more a process of mutual problem solving and teamwork" (p. 20). Bradley Snyder (1994), a school business administrator from New Albany, Indiana, described a 1993 study of 177 school business administrators from that state. One of the purposes of the study was to determine what was school business administrators' perception of

critical success factors (aspects of the job that must be performed correctly for an employee to be considered a success). Snyder observed that "The most critical [of the 19 that were identified] skills identified by this research are related to human interaction" (p. 18). He defined human interaction skills as "the ability to get along with, work with, understand, appreciate, respect, negotiate, empathize, disagree with, and enjoy others" (p. 18). Thus, the requirement to understand and coordinate school business administration activities with other educational activities was recognized as increasingly important.

Sielke (1995) considered the ability to do long-term planning both for educational programs and the necessary revenue to support them as a conceptual skill. She made an observation that was directly related to research focus of this dissertation.

> In those districts where the business administrator was working at the technical level or the human relations level and had not progressed to acceptance at the conceptual skill level, the business administrator had come from a non-education background. There appears to be a more willing acceptance for the business administrator to perform at the conceptual skill level if s/he is an educator. (p. 37)

Nevertheless, because this researcher recognized that her observation was based on limited research, additional study was certainly merited.

It is worth mentioning that only one of the remaining 18 critical success factors in Snyder's (1994) report even approached the conceptual skill as Sielke had defined it. That is, Snyder listed "integrating the district budget with its objectives" (p. 18) as a critical success factor. He defined this skill as "the ability to understand the district's mission statement and ensure dollars are budgeted and spent in congruence with that vision" (p. 18). However, this definition does not coincide with Sielke's description of long-term planning that was cited above because understanding the district's mission and ensuring that appropriate funding is in place do not necessarily require a background in education. Allowing that the description of this integration skill was the result of a survey of school business administrators, a reader could conclude that these individuals had not fully progressed along the continuum of skills to the level of conceptual skill that Sielke described. Drawing this conclusion created the opportunity for further research.

Considering Sielke's analysis from another perspective, ASBO referred to the human relations and conceptual aspects of the school business administrator's job as the team concept. "School business administrators today are expected to be intimately involved in planning for and accomplishing the broadest goals of the school system" (Stevenson & Tharpe, 1999, p. 4). Supporting the team concept, Buchanan (1995) thought that building principals also expected to participate in collaborative decision making, and that financial decisions were not an exception. Uebbing and Kerwin (1997) concurred with Stevenson and Buchanan: "The proper mindset makes the key difference. If business administrators see themselves as integral members of the instructional team, it is likely that they will act to facilitate good instructional practices" (p. 6). Regardless of the labels these scholars gave to interpersonal relationships, the ability to work effectively with other administrators, the ability to understand and to plan educational programs financially, and the willingness to become involved in nontechnical decisions regarding educational programs are requirements for an effective school business administrator. However, acquiring broader understanding

of educational issues can often be problematic for a sitting school business administrator, particularly one who has neither prior experience in education, nor the opportunity to pursue an advanced degree in educational administration, even one with a willingness to become involved in educational programs. Thus, unless a school business administrator with only a business background personally pursues opportunities for professional development he or she would not compare as favorably when being compared with another who has experience in education.

Outside Professional Development for School Business Administrators

Except for very large urban school districts, most school districts have only one employee who functions as the chief school business administrator. Some larger districts have specialists, such as in food service or in transportation, who have responsibility for only a portion of the school business operation. Therefore, having another staff member with similar job-related concerns was unlikely for the chief school business administrator. Krysiak (1988) emphasized the importance

of external professional development activities for chief school administrators:

> Outside the school district, SBOs have several avenues of networking. They can be active participants in their professional associations through committee work, e-mail and through attendance at conferences and regional meetings. They can share their experiences and best professional practices by making presentations at workshops, serving as panelists or writing for professional journals. In addition, as active practitioners, they have much to offer as guest lecturers in university educational administration programs, i.e., school facilities, management and finance courses. (p. 16)

ASBO provides many national programs for school business administrators that offer insight and understanding on broad educational issues. In Connecticut, the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials, the local affiliate of the ASBO, fulfills many of the needs for external professional development regarding state-related educational issues. Thus, the opportunity to reach the conceptual level, as described earlier by Sielke, continues to be offered.

School Business Administrators with Education or Private Sector Experience

In an article in *School Business Affairs*, Fritts (1997, p. 16), an educational management consultant with

a well-known organization that boards of education engage to conduct employment searches for many levels of school administrators, listed the attributes that individuals should possess to be considered qualified school business administrator candidates:

Ability to prepare, interpret, and present budgetary and accounting information;

Management style and philosophy compatible with the hiring school district;

Keen financial management skills;

Existing network of business and community contacts;

Technological competency capable of identifying future applications and needs;

Knowledge of current trends in school design and facilities planning;

Experience with the human resources necessary to support a school district;

Management experience with school district-related support functions, such as food services, student transportation, and school building maintenance from both internally provided and external sources; and

Commitment to lifelong professional development in education.

Clearly, proficiency with the first five attributes could be gained in a setting outside of a school district. However, the final four attributes require previous specialized training and background in education as an endeavor as well as a strong commitment to additional professional training. Confirming Fritts' perception of the need for specialized experience in education, Krysiak (1998) stated, "From transportation safety issues to the purchase of paper, from poor air quality to athletic fields, [school business administrators] must become informed and knowledgeable" (p. 15). Thus, these authors supported the position of ASBO that to be successful as a school business administrator required experience in education.

Ten years prior to Krysiak, Dierdorff (1988), representing ASBO's professional development committee, discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages of treating the school business administrator job function as a professional position as opposed to a higher level clerical position. Some of his conclusions were:

> Leadership is required.
>
> [Professional] standards may be based on prior training, not current and future needs.

> Professional requirements are often unrelated to the job; e.g., few traditional requirements for the position of school superintendent reflect today's real requirements for that position.
>
> Professional standards often focus on technical, measurable aspects of a position instead of other less tangible but necessary requirements.
>
> Pressure on members to fulfill requirements can result in "education inflation" or the slippage of standards.
>
> Unrealistic weight may be given to technical requirements.
>
> The opinions of peers and clients mean more than completion of training. (p. 13)

Clearly and not unexpectedly, Dierdorff strongly advocated establishing school business administration as a profession.

Offering a more current and somewhat different view of professionalism, Goleman (1998b), the chief executive officer of Emotional Intelligence Services of Boston, concluded that experience and expertise at doing a particular job were merely baseline indicators of potential success. He thought that high emotional competency identified those individuals with the additional potential for outstanding performance on the job. "Our emotional intelligence determines our potential for learning the practical skills that are based on its

five elements: self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy and adeptness in relationships. Our emotional competence shows how much of that potential we have translated into on-the-job capabilities" (pp. 24-25). Goleman emphasized that high emotional competence was not a guarantee of exceptional performance at work, but it was a leading indicator of potential.

Thus, Goleman (1998b) affirmed that Dierdorff's concerns regarding overemphasizing technical skills at the expense of other leadership-oriented skills. However, Goleman's affirmation that technical skills were simply a minimum requirement for successful performance at work was significant: "Whatever our intellectual potential, it is expertise--our total body of specialized information and practical skills--that makes us good enough to do a particular job" (pp. 20-21). This affirmation supported the research opportunity for this dissertation. That is, could someone with training and experience only in business expertise become a successful school business administrator and effectively lead the business function in a school district?

Supply and Demand for School Business Administrators

When Should a School District Hire a School Business Administrator

Although there is no prescription for the appropriate time for a school district to hire a school business administrator, ASBO (Wood et al., 1995) offered a number of criteria under which boards of education should consider hiring someone for this position:

Enrollment--when a school district's average daily attendance exceeds 1,500 students;

Growth rate--when a school district experiences sustained growth or shifts in enrollment;

Extent of local programs and services--when support services, such as transportation or food service, and extended services, such as preschool, adult education or community recreation, become significant operational entities;

Physical organization--when a school district has multiple buildings that are not located close to one another, causing logistical problems;

Condition of facilities--when a school district's facilities require significant maintenance or the district plans to construct new facilities;

Qualifications of other central office staff members--when the workload becomes so large that the superintendent can no longer devote sufficient time to business operations and supervising the clerical staff;

Magnitude of the total program--when a school district's program becomes so varied that supervising all aspects becomes difficult for a limited cadre of administrators; for example, when the school district adds vocational education programs or participates in a cooperative venture with other school districts;

Economies of scale--when a school district can perform functions more effectively from a central point, such as implementing computers, purchasing supplies, or managing risk; or

Federal and state grants--when a school district has and must manage a significant number of grants for specific purposes (pp. I-13-I-18).

When a school district's day-to-day operations become more complex than the education-oriented administrators can manage, hiring a school business administrator becomes justifiable. Finding a pool of qualified candidates and hiring a suitable one becomes

the challenge for boards of education and their school districts.

Although ASBO (Wood et al., 1995) only formally declared its suggestions in 1995, in fact, the school business official position had been instituted and was becoming more accepted for approximately 20 years already. Indeed 5 years earlier, Wagner (1990) remarked, "School business managers are becoming as scarce as the financial resources they manage. Chief business officials are retiring at an unprecedented rate, and finding their replacements is getting harder all the time" (p. 25). Armstrong (1990) concurred with Wagner's opinion:

> Competition for administrators, both from within the educational community and from the outside as well, grows each year. School districts are not the only entities that seek [executives] with a proven record of leadership, innovation and cost control. The expanding labor shortage in America will affect school districts and administrators into the 21st century. (p. 41)

In 1993, Wagner, Armstrong, and Speck followed with the statement

> Openings for highly competent chief school business officials will become increasingly competitive throughout the United States. The problem is that these positions will be very difficult to fill because the rate at which chief school business officials are leaving the field may exceed the speed

> at which their successors are being prepared. (pp. 26-27)

Thus, Wagner and Armstrong illustrated the problematic nature of finding a suitable business administrator. Analyzing the traditional pool of candidates deserved consideration.

Candidates to Become School Business Administrators

Moore (1990) wrote that:

> The complexities of today's school business office have swiftly passed by many graduate educational administration departments. Furthermore, business colleges never have been particularly geared to serve the unique needs of school business executives. Even executives who are CPAs have a lot to learn about school business administration. (p. 39)

The complexity of school business operations coupled with a diminishing supply of qualified school business administrators requires a larger and more varied pool of candidates. A 1992-1993 ASBO study (Wagner et al., 1993) highlighted the issue of pending retirements by incumbent school business administrators. Of the 552 school business administrators who responded to the survey, 57.2% indicated that they intended to retire within 10 years, or by the year 2002.

Acknowledging the potential shortage of school business administrator candidates, some states have sought individuals from the private sector to fill the open positions. For example, Connecticut and New York have provided alternate paths to certification as a school business administrator for candidates with only private sector business experience. In 1991, Terry Schruers from the New York State ASBO affiliate organization stated, "There was a feeling at the time that there were a lot of good people in the private business field who were being locked out because they did not have teaching experience" (D. T. Murphy, 1997, p. 34). In fact, in New York, the requirement for prior teaching experience has subsequently been eliminated. From their inception in 1977, requirements for school business administrator certification in Connecticut (State of Connecticut Department of Education, 2000b, Regulation 10-145d-589, p. 158) necessitated at least 3 years of work experience in either the public or the private sector, of which at least six specific areas of business administration must be included. Recognizing the differences of opinion regarding a school business official's experience, Sielke (1995) wrote:

> The debate continues as to whether the business administrator should be someone from business, such as an accountant, or whether the business administrator should be an educator who learns accounting. The background of the individual may affect his/her duties and relationship with the rest of the staff. (p. 34)

Thus, there continues to be significant debate without clear consensus.

Candidates with only private sector experience have made varied observations about making the transition to being school business administrators. D. T. Murphy (1997) listed the observations from 24 school business administrators from New York who had moved from the private sector into public education. The respondents indicated that their new assignments had more diverse responsibilities with higher visibility, employees with a "union mentality"--lacking urgency, a sense of responsibility and analytical skills, more challenging personnel issues, employees who resisted change, a heightened political element, more cumbersome and bureaucratic processes than the private sector, little focus on efficiency because of the lack of a profit motivation, and generally smaller organizations. Consistent with Sielke's (1995) conclusions that were mentioned previously, the respondents further found the

accounting and financial requirements of the position to be less challenging than the human relations aspects of the job. D. T. Murphy's respondents supported Moore's earlier statement regarding the complexities of current school business offices:

> Current school business executives who came from private practice or business and industry say that most of their learning was done on the job . . . few current school business executives arrived at their present level of responsibility having had broad exposure to the diversity of activities occupying specialists in the school business office. . . . A consequence of this is that current school business executives readily admit that they could not themselves do the tasks performed daily in the school business by the specialists they supervise. (pp. 39, 40)

Most of Murphy's respondents felt that they were prepared technically for the job, but the school districts' staffs did not always welcome the outsiders, consequently making it more difficult for them to exercise their expertise. They further stated that the superintendents and school boards generally appreciated their technical skills and problem-solving capabilities. Thus, this literature corroborated the research opportunity of understanding how individuals from the private sector fared when they moved to public education and whether the skills that the individuals brought with them were desirable ones.

Connecticut's Pool of School Business Administrator Candidates

In order to investigate the pool of qualified school business administrator candidates this researcher decided to explore the history of their certification requirements in Connecticut. The researcher interviewed Nancy J. Harris (personal communication, August 20, 2001), the Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Operations of the Westport, Connecticut, school district. Miss Harris has had a career that spans almost 30 years, involving school business administration in Connecticut. During that career she has been a professor at the University of Connecticut, an employee of Connecticut's department of education, a school business official in multiple districts in Connecticut, and a member and officer in the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO). Miss Harris stated that, in the mid-1970s, the impetus to require certification for school business officials came almost exclusively from CASBO. The Connecticut department of education had not expressed interest in requiring this certification. Other potentially interested parties, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Connecticut

Teachers' Retirement Board, and local boards of education through their respective superintendents did not support certification for school business officials.

During the 1970s, as federal and state grants to school districts began to proliferate, both the state education department and local districts placed increased emphasis on the equitable allocation of these funds. Because a series of calculation errors with these grants required the attention of qualified individuals within the local school district, CASBO's previous advocacy for professionalizing and certifying the school business official position gained momentum and eventual approval. Thus, in 1977 Section 10-145d-588 of the State of Connecticut Regulations of the State Board of Education established the current four possible paths for certification as a school business official:

1. Hold a bachelor's or master's degree from an approved institution with major concentration either in business administration or public administration, having completed course work in the following prescribed areas: law, accounting, finance, management, personnel, and informational systems; or

2. Hold a bachelor's degree from an approved institution, having completed a minimum of 12 semester hours of credit in the prescribed following areas: school law, school finance, school plant planning and operation, school business administration, budgeting and resource management, personnel, collective bargaining, systems analysis, and operations; or

3. Hold a master's degree or 6th-year certificate in educational administration or educational management, having completed a minimum of 12 semester hours of credit in the prescribed following areas: school business administration, school finance, budgeting and resource management, school law, personnel administration, school plant planning and operation, collective bargaining, system analysis, and operations research; or

4. In addition to possessing a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an approved institution and in lieu of the prescribed course work in subsection (a) of this section, has successfully completed a minimum of 3 years of work in public or private business administration, such work to have involved not less than six of the responsibilities listed in Section 10-145d-588

of these regulations, or educational administration or public administration.

Clearly, the first and fourth options require neither work experience or course work in education. Exploring the effects of allowing these options was the predominant subject of this dissertation.

Pecheone, bureau chief of Connecticut's Department of Education's Bureau of Curriculum and Teacher Standards, published a report in 1999 that projected the supply and demand trends for educators in the state's 166 school districts. The report stated that:

> Connecticut public school districts are expected to hire an average of 171 new administrators annually over the next five years. Most of the new administrators will be hired to replace retirees, although some new entry-level positions such as assistant and associate principal positions are likely to be created at the middle and high school levels to respond to enrollment increases. More than half of the state's annual new administrative hires, historically, have been continuing educators who worked in other public school assignment areas during the previous year. This translates into an actual demand for about 85 new administrators per year and about 85 continuing educators who migrate into administrative positions from other assignment areas. (p. 10)

Although this report did not separate school business administrators from other administrators below the level of superintendent, it did indicate that between October

1, 1997 and September 30, 1998 there were 25 newly certified school business administrators. The report projected that administrators (including school business administrators) would be a "non-shortage area" for the period 1999 through 2003. Because the State of Connecticut did not make the credentials of newly certified school business administrators available, it was not possible to determine whether these individuals came directly from the private sector or they were existing educators from Connecticut who sought an additional certification category. Therefore, determining whether or not Connecticut's seemingly more liberal approach to certifying school business administrators was beneficial to the overall pool of qualified candidates was not possible from the available data.

Training Programs for School Business Administrators

Connecticut's three other paths to certification as a school business administrator required course work in education related to the business aspects of running a school district. Thus, attempting to ascertain the

potential effect of Connecticut's wisdom in not requiring formal training as a school business administrator, the researcher investigated training programs for school business administrators in order to explore how many individuals might achieve certification through one of the other three paths.

In 1990, Armstrong, proposing alternatives to solve an impending overall national shortage of school business administrators, offered, "School districts, universities, and professional associations could collectively initiate programs to ensure that administrative skills that are needed are available" (p. 41). Subsequently concurring with the lack of available training for school business administrators, Dierdorff (1994) stated, "Even with the large number of dollars involved and the need for public accountability, few formal school business administrator training programs exist, and those that do are not standardized" (p. 23). In 1998, Pichel and Piper from the ASBO affiliate organization in Michigan indicated, "The academic preparation of school business officials will become increasingly important as fewer graduate schools of education offer specialized programs in school business management" (p. 6). These authors clearly

agreed concerning the requirement for formalized alternatives for school business administrators.

Representing ASBO, Stevenson and Tharpe (1999) wrote:

> [S]ome type of formal professional program of preparation can provide knowledge and experience that will enhance the probability of success . . . the majority of individuals who aspire to be school business officials today will find that school boards expect them to be college-trained and, in many cases, to have had previous professional experience, either in education or in business. (p. 58)

Acknowledging the acceptability of previous professional experience in business could be considered as a concession to previous positions taken by ASBO. Its prior attempts to establish a model preparation program had not been widely accepted by state departments of education and local school districts (Meglis, 1998). Describing ASBO's prior efforts to standardize preparation for school business administrators, Meglis wrote,

> The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) has also tried to unify the requirements for becoming a school business administrator. They attempted to achieve this goal by forging a partnership with various colleges and universities and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (p. 106)

Thus, these statements supported the fact that even accepting Connecticut's four possible paths to certification, there currently is no generally accepted process for training school business administrators prior to their certification and appointment.

Lacking consensus regarding an acceptable process for training school business administrators, continuing education, both professional and informal, must complement on-the-job performance experiences for school business administrators. In 1987, Bissell stated that, "Continuing education is most valuable when it is recognized as a needed ingredient in our life . . . a true continuing education program is designed to achieve goals that will accentuate and complement the total professional career" (p. 96). Godshall (1998), then an ASBO director, subsequently supported Bissell's earlier conclusion when he posited that school business administrators should keep their skills current through professional development. He wrote, "To a degree, each of us pursues a singular professional development plan. The plan may be as elaborate as a formally written document or as simple as a conscious idea to learn more

about one topic" (p. 9). Godshall included four possible professional development processes in his analysis:

Staff development--formal and informal programs offered to groups to address a specific need;

Peer interaction--information dissemination through networking and mentoring sessions;

Benchmarking--assessing performance against a known measure or standard, for example transportation costs per student; and

Individual development--self-directed endeavors in pursuit of a particular objective, such as pursuing an advanced degree.

"Data [from a 1997 ASBO survey] shows that SBOs [school business officials/administrators] received the majority of their training and preparation in-service. Furthermore, other data substantiated a preference for future training from a professional association rather than a university or college" (Glass, Everett, & Johnson, 1998, p. 23). Graduate schools of education might interpret these survey results as a challenging opportunity for new programs.

This researcher concluded that, throughout the previous decade, the opinions regarding the lack of and

the need for preservice training for school business administrators were consistent. However, in order to gain knowledge and to enhance job-related professional skills, thereby producing greater personal achievement and job satisfaction, it was further necessary for a functioning school business administrator to pursue a professional development plan.

Certification Requirements in States Near Connecticut

Accepting a state's certification requirements for school business administrators as an expression of that state's opinion regarding mandatory preservice training and professional development for these individuals and having considered various opinions pertaining to preservice training as well as beliefs regarding professional development, this researcher further investigated the specific certification requirements for the states where Connecticut's school business administrators might most conveniently seek alternate employment.

Table 2, excerpted from a larger one (Everett & Mastro, 1994, pp. 8-11) and subsequently updated to

Table 2

A Comparison of Certification Requirements for School Business Administrators

	State				
	Connecticut	Massachusetts	New Jersey	New York	Rhode Island
SBA certification required	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Formal training required	No	24 semester hours	15 semester hours	60 semester hours with 24 in administration and supervision	No
College degree required	BA/BS	BA/BS	BA/BS	Post-BA/BS certificate of advanced study	No
Internship required	No	Year equivalent experience	Mentor	Yes	No
Technical certification required	Required	Yes or Administrator	No	No	No
Administrative certification required	No	No	No	No	No
Job experience required	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Must pass state examination	No	No	No	No	No

Sources. State of Connecticut Regulation of State Board of Education 10-145d-589; State of Massachusetts Department of Education Certification Manual (38); State of New Jersey Department of Education Professional Licensure and Standards Subchapter 9-6:11-9.7; The University of the State of New York, the State Education Department, Section 207 of Education Law, paragraph 80.4, subparagraph (c); and State of Rhode Island Department of Education--phone inquiry.

include current certification requirements (see sources listed below table), summarizes the certification requirements in the states surrounding Connecticut. The purpose of this comparison is to portray the differences among the surrounding states. The researcher considered the listed states because a school business administrator from Connecticut, especially ones who live close to Connecticut's borders could reasonably seek employment in one of these states rather than in Connecticut.

Rhode Island does not have state mandated certification requirements for school business administrators. Individual school districts made employment decisions in Rhode Island. The remaining four states all require certification for school business administrators, but Connecticut has the least restrictive requirements for certification. For example, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York all required formal training, college-level credits in the field of education, for certification as a school business administrator. Connecticut does not require credits in education. Massachusetts and New York require that school business administrators complete an internship (allowing possible credit for other relevant service in a

school district) prior to certification. Similarly, New Jersey (Trivellini, 1996) requires that beginning school business administrators work under the tutelage of a State-appointed mentor for a 1-year period of time. Massachusetts requires that school business administrators have additional prior state certification as a teacher or administrator. Massachusetts and New Jersey require previous work experience, even in a field other than education. None of the five states require that school business administrators pass a licensing examination. Thus, it was reasonable to conclude that someone with work experience outside of education, who lived in or around Connecticut, and who wished to become a school business administrator, would find Connecticut an attractive place to seek a job. Rhode Island has limited employment opportunities for school business administrators because of its small number of school districts.

Variations in the training requirements for certification or appointment as a school business administrator have received limited attention in previous research. For example, Dierdorff (1994) supported the above analysis when he concluded that "the degree,

frequency and level of skills [to be effective as a school business administrator] varies with the size, location and expectations of the individual district" (p. 23). The following section considers some of what has been done in this regard.

Existing Research About Training for School Business Administrators

Much of ASBO's and its state affiliate organizations' research (Wagner et al., 1993) during the 1980s and 1990s considered school business administrators' job satisfaction, salaries, benefits, and the impending shortage of qualified candidates to fill these positions. Invariably, the respondents in these research efforts have been the school business administrators themselves. Most often, the respondents were members of ASBO. Reading other individuals' doctoral dissertations provided limited research regarding training of school business administrators.

Since 1987, the Danforth Foundation (Milstein, 1993) has studied efforts and approaches to training educational leaders. Dierdorff (1994) referenced a joint project by ASBO and the Danforth Foundation that began in

1988. Considering the objectives of school business administrators and representatives of higher education who were engaged in educational leadership programs, the project produced a model curriculum for school business administrators. These curriculum guidelines were approved by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education in 1991 (Kerr, 1996). Attempting to validate the model curriculum in 1993, Dierdorff's unpublished doctoral dissertation from Portland State University in Portland, Oregon, surveyed the perceptions of those receiving training in school business administration, targeting 251 practicing school business administrators (members of ASBO). Dierdorff's (1994) effort concluded that "[t]here was no single preferred source of training, but rather a preference for a variety of sources. . . . Preference for a source of training may reflect a respondent's personal experience" (p. 29). However, Dierdorff emphasized the necessity for some formal training structure for school business administrators. Additional investigation of doctoral research offered more particular information.

To complete his doctoral dissertation at the University of La Verne in La Verne, California, Leininger

(1994) studied the training of 78 school business administrators in California. Leininger concluded that:

Respondents claimed they received training in the majority of the accounting and budgeting topics surveyed, but they needed more training in management and creative financing, and had received no training in eight topics, for example in grant writing;

"On-the-job" training in an educational setting was the most frequent mode of training, sometimes limiting less experienced school business administrators;

Respondents thought that the formal training was useful;

Less experienced school business administrators came from the business setting, and more experienced ones came from the educational setting;

Replacements for practicing school business administrators appear to be coming from the business setting;

A majority of the school business administrators who were surveyed preferred training for budgeting in a business setting; and

When there was a significant difference in the preferred setting for training, school business

administrators in this survey preferred the business setting.

Leininger (1994) recommended that "Colleges and universities should create a curriculum for chief business officials using both the business and education departments to develop programs that include both the technical aspects of the business side of the job and the topics associated with the educational side of the job" (pp. 86-87). In the early 1990s, Fordham University conducted a program similar to Leininger's recommendation, the Fordham Institute for Training School Business Officials.

Trivellini's (1996) doctoral dissertation at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey, investigated the effectiveness of an alternate certification training process for school business administrators in New Jersey. Trivellini surveyed 29 pairs of school business administrators and superintendents from the same school district to conduct his research. He sought to determine the effectiveness of a training program that the State of New Jersey contracted with the New Jersey Association of School Business Officials to conduct. Trivellini found that:

The school business administrators exhibited positive changes in performance following the training as perceived by both the superintendents and the school business administrators themselves;

The school business administrators displayed positive changes in attitude following the training, again as perceived by both the superintendents and the school business administrators themselves; and

The superintendents rated the improvements in the school business administrator's performance higher than the respective school business administrators did.

Trivellini's research clearly supported Leininger's (1994) work, emphasizing the importance of training. However, he added an important concept. Trivellini considered the opinions of another group, the respective superintendents in each district, in drawing his conclusions. Taking Trivellini's innovative step further was the intended contribution of this research. This research considered multiple opinions and evaluations of school business administrators, the opinions and evaluations of other members of the school business administrator's organization, the school district.

More current work in the field of human resources further supported Trivellini's innovation:

> A long history of research suggests that people do not evaluate themselves accurately--or at least not in line with how others view them. Numerous researchers have documented that self-ratings of behavior, personality, and other job performance categories suffer from unreliability and bias, and generally are suspect and inaccurate when compared with ratings provided by others or with other objective measures. And generally--although not always--the self-perceptions people have reflect positive biases. (Waldman & Atwater, 1998, p. 6)

Professionals in the field of human resources have named the process of considering multisource assessments of an employee's job performance 360-degree feedback. "Because the feedback providers are those with whom the employee interacts regularly at work, their assessments are reliable, valid and credible" (Edwards & Ewen, 1996, p. 7). The following section provides additional information regarding 360-degree feedback.

360-Degree Feedback to Evaluate an Employee's Job Performance

Waldman and Atwater (1998) defined 360-degree feedback as a type of survey feedback. "It focuses specifically on the appraisal of managers by their subordinates, peers, customers, and superiors based on

critical competencies associated with supervision or leadership" (p. 5). Edwards and Ewen (1996), respectively the CEO and president of TEAMS, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in 360-degree feedback, emphasized that the method considers the collective opinions of those who worked most closely with an individual. Describing the applicability of the 360-degree Feedback process, Edwards and Ewen stated: "The honest input from others can [help a person] overcome false self-perceptions, blind spots, and just plain ignorance. Candid feedback from relevant others may save careers when people can avoid making stupid mistakes" (p. 4). Waldman and Atwater also concluded that considering an individual's or leader's observable behaviors and the impact that these behaviors have on others was relevant because:

Having been based on what truly matters, observer's perception, these ratings were most likely more valuable than self-ratings;

Leaders who did not understand and acknowledge others' perceptions of them were at a disadvantage; and

When leaders did not perceive themselves as others did, negative organizational consequences resulted.

The purpose of this research was not to review the performance ratings of specific school business administrators. However, the processes used in 360-degree feedback are viable measurement tools for this research. "Multi-source systems are more accurate, credible, and valid than single-rater systems. Academic and field research provide compelling evidence that multi-source assessments are fairer than single-source systems" (Edwards & Ewen, 1996, p. 54). Thus, although the approach of using the 360-degree feedback processes was not the conventional one, the validity of using multisource input for this research was appropriate. Because school business administrators' leadership skills were the focus of this research, investigating "leadership" as a subject became necessary.

Leadership

Leadership in School Administration

In 1910, Spaulding, the superintendent of schools in Newton, Massachusetts, wrote:

> In its present state, school administration is not the live product of clear, far-sighted vision and keen insight; it is the sluggish resultant of tradition, habit, routine, prejudice, and inertia, slightly modified by occasional and local outbursts of spasmodic, semi-intelligent, progressive

> activity. In school administration, there is little thinking and leading, but much feeling and following, with faces turned more often to the rear than to the front. (Bacharach & Mundell, 1995, p. 315)

Some learned individuals would say that Spaulding's comment is no less a propos as we begin the 21st century. Critics (Bacharach & Mundell, p. 317) contend that additional research in the field of school leadership has added little to the body of knowledge or to practice. Scholars, sometimes pressured to produce research intended to gain tenure, seemingly generate short-term research analyzing longer term issues and problems. "Many scholars and practitioners [of education] alike still hold traditional conceptions of leadership that are increasingly disconnected from the complex realities of modern systems" (p. 337). Bacharach and Mundell continued, "Studies of school leadership have often relied on static lists of administrative behaviors rather than on dynamic and integrated notions of what leadership is" (p. 340). Thus, disagreement about what leadership truly is continues, but contrasting the phrase "static lists" with "dynamic and integrated notions" in the prior citation became particularly relevant.

Leadership Defined

Kotter (1990) of the Harvard Business School defined leadership as "a process that helps direct and mobilize people and/or their ideas" (p. 3). He included three subprocesses:

1. Establishing direction--offering a vision of the future and the strategies for achieving that vision;

2. Aligning people--communicating with the participants (followers) to ensure understanding of the vision and to promote coalitions for achieving it; and

3. Motivating and inspiring--keeping people moving in the appropriate direction despite the barriers to change.

Kouzes and Posner are two noted authors on the subject of leadership. They similarly defined leadership as "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 30). They emphasized the "want to do" aspect of leadership--mobilizing others to want to do something because of the credibility the leader has.

> [W]hen people work with leaders they admire and respect, they feel better about themselves. Credible leaders raise self-esteem. Leaders who make a difference to others cause people to feel that they too can make a difference. They set

> people's spirits free and enable them to become more than they might have thought possible. (p. 31)

Similarly, when discussing the empowering nature of credible leadership, Goleman (1998b) wrote,

> One way leaders establish their credibility is by sensing these collective, unspoken feelings [undercurrents of emotion that pervade a group] and articulating them for the group, or acting in a way that tacitly shows they are understood. In this sense, the leader is a mirror, reflecting back to the group its own experience. (p. 185)

Ulrich considered the result of credible leadership, stating that "[t]he outcome of effective leadership is simple. It must turn aspirations into actions. Aspirations come in many forms: strategies, goals, missions, visions, foresight, and plans. Regardless of the term, leaders create aspirations" (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Beckhard, 1996, p. 210). Thus, leadership is a process by which credible individuals motivate others to actively share and seek a vision of how things should and could be.

Given ASBO's description of the school business administrator's responsibilities, this organization was more concerned with static lists of management responsibilities than with dynamic and integrated

leadership. Hence, differentiating between management and leadership became necessary.

Leadership Compared with Management

Kotter (1990) strongly emphasized the difference between leadership processes and those that have been associated with modern management. Specifically, the management process, a product of the Industrial Era, was intended to produce consistent results in an orderly manner, and included three subprocesses:

1. Planning and budgeting--setting goals and targets for the future, and allocating the required resources to achieve the goals;

2. Organizing and staffing--establishing the organizational structure for accomplishing the objectives of the plan; and

3. Controlling and problem solving--managing results compared with a plan and initiating corrective action when deviations from the plan existed.

There was considerable congruence between Kotter's descriptions and Wood et al.'s (1995) description in the previous section, the School Business Administrator's Responsibilities.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) wrote, "[M]anaging is about handling things, about maintaining order, about organizational control" (p. 36). Noted author on the subject of leadership, Covey similarly concluded that "Leadership focuses on doing the right things; management focuses on doing things right. Leadership makes sure the ladders we are climbing are leaning against the right wall; management makes sure we are climbing in the most efficient ways possible" (Hesselbein et al., 1996, p. 154). Bennis (1989), a noted author on the subject of leadership, wrote, "Many an institution is very well managed and very poorly led. It may excel in the ability to handle each day all the routine inputs yet may never ask whether the routine should be done at all" (p. 17). To compare the two concepts: The focus of leadership was dynamic, on moving toward a common vision, while the focus of management was static, on ensuring and measuring results for consistency. Describing the processes of education organizations, Gelberg (1997) wrote,

> Control was the guiding principle and to gain that control superintendents tended to think in terms of models presented by both the military and the corporation--that is, the central office had to have authority over every decision in the organization. They were encouraged to use these models by their graduate training, the business sector, and by the

> school board members who themselves were often businessmen. They also received support for using an industrial model of management from academicians who promoted the idea that universal management principles could be applied in the business setting and the school situation alike. (p. 75)

As a field, much of education continues to focus on measurements: test scores, state aid formulas, percentages of increase in budgets, percentages of increase in collective bargaining agreements, acquiring numbers of academic credits toward certification, and similar standards. So, education remains management oriented, posing a cultural challenge for district administrators also charged with being leaders.

Depending on the size of the employing school district and the school business administrator's position within it, these administrators spend some portion of their time at work interacting with others (superiors, peers, subordinates, agents of the other governmental bodies, and vendors) and the remainder of their time addressing managerial concerns. Thus, depending on the distribution of the school business administrator's time, his or her ability to provide educational leadership may be elusive according to Kotter's definition.

Introducing the ability to implement change as a key component for success, Goleman (1998b) stated, "For organizations riding the waves of change (and what organization is not these days?), traditional management is not enough. In times of transformation, a charismatic, inspiring leader is called for" (p. 196). Effective leadership is not the same as effective management, and sharing a vision of the future is a key differentiation between the two concepts.

Despite the volumes that have been written about implementing change in education and educational administration, even acknowledging that the school business administrator's responsibilities have also changed, change within the field of education has not occurred as quickly. Therefore, considering preparation programs for school business administrators seemed relevant to understanding the dichotomy between management skills and leadership skills. Are educational administration programs preparing school business administrators to be managers rather than leaders?

Preparation Programs in Educational Administration

Describing the challenges that 21st-century leaders would face, Hesselbein (Hesselbein et al., 1996), president of the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management, wrote, "Leaders of the future will say, 'This is intolerable,' as they look at the schools, at the health of children who will make up the future work force, at inadequate preparation for life and work in too many families, at people losing trust in their institutions" (p. 23). Whether or not one considers this observation particularly insightful, it is remarkably consistent with some of the criticisms of education by business and political leaders that were cited in Chapter I. Offering another opinion about the problems of leadership associated with education, J. Murphy (1992), chairman of the Educational Leadership department at Vanderbilt University in Nashville and a highly regarded author on the subject of educational leadership, wrote:

> [T]he problems in education are the business of educational administration and that insofar as education is failing, the educational administrator is subject to indictment, [therefore] school leadership is perceived to be a contributing factor to other problems in education . . . if educational administration as a profession is subject to

> indictment, then schools of education are proper co-defendants. In short, preparation programs for school administrators must be held accountable for the anemic state of leadership found in school systems throughout the nation. (pp. 5-6)

This was powerful language indeed. Corroborating J. Murphy, Milstein (1993) described a 1988 study of 1,123 graduates of educational administration programs:

> Forty-six percent thought that their preparation programs were not rigorous enough for the realities of the positions for which they were training. Most devastating, when asked what the most significant element in their preparation was, only 10% identified their graduate program, as opposed to more than 60% who identified on-the-job training. (p. viii)

Given that the above citations were generally dismaying, J. Murphy at least saw some positive potential in the increasing amount being written about the true differences that some administrators make in the effectiveness of their schools and in the lives of their students and teachers. He also recognized that some alternative organizational models broke the stranglehold that bureaucracy had on education. Considering the perceptions of the problems and the promise of the remedies, Schneider (1993) wrote:

> Recent studies of school business administrator training needs identify as many as 16 areas for development. All call for superior management and executive planning skills. However, the new roles

> and relationships brought on by school restructuring, as well as the impact of taxpayer revolt, suggest that the leadership skills of the business manager will also need to be developed to keep pace with the demands of multiple stakeholders and the insistence on shared decision making. (p. 20)

Similarly, Lewis (1993) stated, "If schools are to be strong institutions in the next century, then school leaders must adapt their attitudes and skills. In fact, change in schools depends on changes in leadership skills" (p. 44). Thus, some professors who were engaged in preparing school business administrators recognized the emphasis on management skills as defined by Kotter, but they, along with others, also recognized that the changing demands of education required leadership skills. Schneider summarized the changing demands thusly:

> Now there is great potential for the school business administrator to be a teacher and model of 21st century skills. These skills will promote organizational structures, norms and policies that lead to genuine teamwork. This new leadership role demands greater interpersonal and group skills and goes beyond rational management strategies to the development of the organization and all of its constituents. (p. 20)

Analyzing leadership training in the United States, Kouzes and Posner (1995) concluded, "Unfortunately, formal training still doesn't reach the majority of United States employees, especially those in the public

and nonprofit sector, and thus doesn't play as significant a role in leadership development as it could" (p. 332). Kouzes and Posner (1993) identified four characteristics that constituents desired in their leaders:

1. Honesty--the leader must be someone worthy of the constituent's trust;

2. Forward looking--the leader must be directed and concerned about the future of the organization;

3. Inspiring--the leader must be dynamic, enthusiastic, positive, and optimistic; and

4. Competent--the leader must be capable and effective.

Individual interpretations of the fourth characteristic, competence, are the most controversial when considering school business administrators with only private sector work experience. Thus, researching peers' opinions of specific school business administrators' competence held as a dissertation topic.

Summary of Literature Review

School business administrators have an unrivaled position within the field of education because their

work-related activities span both the education and the business sectors of the economy. These administrators must adapt continually to the instability caused by changing circumstances and conditions. Some members of the business community credit the continual adaptation to changes driven by the external forces of the marketplace as a factor that separates businessmen from educators. The seeming disparity might be explained best by the rate of change in the two sectors. Change in education seems to occur more slowly than it does in business. For managers or administrators to perform effectively either in business or in education requires similar and frequently compatible skills. Adding credibility to the previous statement, the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) has recognized the importance of backgrounds in both business and education for its members. Investigating the transferability of skills acquired from experience in business to the activities related to school district business administration was the goal of this research.

The maturation of a school business administrator's skills can be represented by a series of developmental stages. In the first stage, current school business

administrators must demonstrate technical skills: the ability to prepare, interpret, and present financial and operational data; the ability to identify the need for and implement computer and telecommunications technology for school district administration; and experience with school district-related support functions such as facilities design and planning, student transportation, and food service. The public's and the government's increasing demands to educate the nation's students combined with the public's reluctance to support the accompanying increases in costs to support public education mandate that school business administrators have these technical skills. The second stage of the series requires the ability to work well with others, that is human relations skills. School business administrators must have a management philosophy and style that permits them to work collegially as part of a team and to understand, appreciate, respect, and politely differ with other people. In other words, school business administrators spend some of their time using technical skills, that is, addressing managerial measurements, and some of their time using human relations skills, that is, interacting with others.

Recognizing that some of the technical skills that are particular to education would not be conversely applicable to business, the skills that are required to be effective in either education or business endeavors are remarkably transferable for the first two stages. However, the third stage in the series, conceptual skills, requires a deeper level of understanding of education. Conceptual skills mean the ability to understand the school district's mission and the ability to communicate the vision to others. At this stage, the school business administrator has to ensure congruence between the school district's expenditures and its vision. For the school business administrator to function as an integral member of the school district's instructional team requires broader knowledge and understanding of educational programs and instructional practices. School business administrators' activities and responsibilities enable teachers, other administrators, and policy makers to make the best educational decisions that have business implications.

Allowing that school business administrators are willing to understand programs and practices, the lack of opportunities for additional training is problematic for

school business administrators, but it is much more challenging for those with only experience in the private sector. The lack of training opportunities in specific programs and practices highlights the vital need for external professional development activities for school business administrators. Researching previous literature revealed certain trends regarding school business administration and education that are as true today as they were decades ago when much of the early research was done.

Despite ASBO's advocacy of formal professional training to enhance a school business administrator's probability of success, there is not a generally accepted process for training school business administrators. Few formal training programs for school business administrators exist. There are some examples of the advantages of formal training. For instance, in New Jersey, school business administrators exhibited positive changes in performance after participating in state-sponsored training. Attempting to institutionalize the requirement for formal training for school business administrators, ASBO also proposed that states require certification similar to the process for certifying

teachers and other administrators. ASBO's proposal did not receive widespread acceptance.

The complexities of today's school district business offices have exceeded the capabilities of many graduates of educational administration programs. As day-to-day school district operations became more complex than existing administrators could manage, hiring a specialist in school business administration was justifiable for many school districts. Acknowledging the decision to add the specialist to the school district's organization, finding suitable candidates was difficult in many areas of the United States. The rate at which school business administrators are retiring exceeds that at which others are applying and qualifying for the available positions. Consequently, some states have sought replacements from the private sector, including allowing alternate paths to required certification. For example, Connecticut has less restrictive requirements for certification than its contiguous states, excluding Rhode Island, which does not require certification at all. Connecticut, then, is a desirable place for candidates from the private sector to seek employment as a school business administrator, and so it is also a desirable place to research how

candidates without prior experience in the field of education fared.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

In the first two chapters, consideration of Sielke's (1995) work indicated that school business administrators' job performance progressed along a continuum of skills, that is, from technical skills to human relations skills to the highest level, conceptual skills. Sielke observed: "There appears to be a more willing acceptance for the [school] business administrator to perform at the conceptual skill level if s/he is an educator" (p. 37). Sielke considered conceptual level skills to include long-term planning linking financial resources to educational goals, shared decision making, consensus building strategies and policy making. Kouzes and Posner (1995) defined leadership as the art of mobilizing others to seek shared aspirations. Combining these two ideas produced this dissertation's problem statement: Can a school business administrator

without prior experience in the field of education provide leadership at the highest level, the conceptual level, to his or her school district. As stated in Chapter I, the research questions were:

1. What are the desired attributes (i.e., training, experience, or personal traits) that a school business administrator should have?

2. Why are the desired attributes indicated in question 1 important?

3. Is the interaction between the school district's business administrator and the other administrators in the office essential to the smooth day-to-day operation of the school district?

4. Does the school business administrator's role within the district's organization have educational importance?

5. Does the presence or absence of the desired attributes in the school business administrator affect other district and school level administrators' capabilities to perform their duties? If so, in what ways?

6. Could someone who did not have a background in education but wanted to become a school business administrator effectively provide the desired attributes?

This chapter describes the research process--conceptual framework, methodology, data collection, and data analysis--that was used to examine and investigate the problem statement and the research questions.

Conceptual Framework

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated, "All research is grounded by some theoretical orientation. Good researchers are aware of their theoretical base and use it to collect and analyze data . . . most qualitative researchers reflect some sort of phenomenological perspective" (p. 22). "[T]heory means the design of research steps according to some relationship to the literature, policy issues, or other substantive source" (Yin, 1993, p. 4). Researchers who employ a phenomenological mode of research attempt to explain how ordinary people understand the meaning of events and interactions in particular situations. Common usage employs the term *participant* to describe the ordinary people whose perspectives are to be understood.

"Qualitative researchers believe that approaching people with a goal of trying to understand their point of view, while not perfect, distorts the informants' [participants'] experience the least . . . and is useful in understanding the human condition" (Bogdan & Biklen, pp. 24, 25). Thus, examining and understanding multiple persons' realities (often within the same or similar setting) rather than only a single person's reality are the concerns of a qualitative researcher.

Another term (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 54) frequently associated with qualitative research is the case study, a detailed examination of one setting, subject, repository of documents, or event. Conducting these detailed examinations is the strategy and work of qualitative researchers attempting to explain multiple realities. Merriam (1998), a frequent author on the subject of qualitative research, wrote, "The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon" (p. 41). Case study designs have been used frequently and are well suited for applied fields of research, such as education.

Providing additional insight on case studies, Yin (1994) listed three conditions for determining a research strategy: the type of research questions, the extent of control that the researcher has over actual behavioral events, and the focus on contemporary versus historical events. For "how" and "why" questions leading to explanations, Yin recommended case studies or field experiments. To answer "why" questions, Yin suggested conducting interviews, possibly using multiple cases. Yin stated, "The case study is preferred in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated. . . . The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence--documents, artifacts, interviews and observations" (p. 8). Thus, when "how" or "why" questions are being asked about contemporary events over which the researcher has little or no control, the case study framework has a distinct advantage over other research methods for explaining situations and occurrences. In a prior publication, Yin (1993) indicated that case study analyses permit using pattern-matching techniques for providing explanations of events. Gall et al. (1996) described another advantage of using

case study analysis--the emergent quality of the research data.

> As researchers collect data and gain insight into particular phenomena, they can change the case on which the study will focus, adopt new data-collection methods, and frame new research questions. In contrast, quantitative research designs are difficult to change once they are set into motion. (p. 585)

Merriam (1998) advised that case studies are particularly applicable for research that considers process. She meant discovering or confirming the effect that a particular treatment, for example, in this dissertation a school business administrator's lack of formal training in the field of education, had on a process such as leading a school district's business operations. Merriam also offered another reason for conducting case study research that pertains to this dissertation. She stated, "A case study might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to" (p. 33). As the review of the literature in Chapter II reflected, this researcher found no existing study of this perspective on school business operations. Thus, incorporating the case study design was appropriate.

Methodology

Merriam (1998) described the purpose of using case studies as a design for conducting research, "Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (p. 19). Without minimizing the importance of methods, she posited that the uniqueness of a case study lies in the questions asked and their relationship to the results rather than in the methods employed to conduct the research. She further compared knowledge garnered from case study research with knowledge obtained from other forms of research, and she concluded that case study knowledge was:

More concrete, vivid, and sensory than it was abstract;

More rooted in context than other research designs;

Further developed by the experience and understanding of the subsequent reader, leading to extended generalizations from combining new and old data; and

Based more on the subsequent readers' reference populations, potentially extending the generalizations to new reference populations.

Merriam (1998) made some additional comments that have been excerpted below because of their specific relevance to this dissertation. Case study research can:

- examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem [issue],
- illustrate the complexities of a situation,
- have the advantage of hindsight yet be relevant in the future,
- show the influence of personalities on the issue,
- show the influence of the passage of time on the issue,
- cover many years and describe how the preceding decades led to a situation, and
- spell out differences of opinion on the issue and suggest how these differences have influenced the result. (pp. 30-31)

While the frequency of case study research continues to grow, some researchers question the ability to generalize its findings. In other words, can the findings from one case study be generalized to other cases or to all cases? This researcher did not disregard this concern and incorporated a strategy to lessen its impact in this dissertation.

General Application of Case Study Findings

Case study researcher Yin (1994) stated:

> A common complaint about case studies is that it is difficult to generalize from one case to another. Thus, analysts fall into the trap of trying to select a "representative" case or set of cases. Yet, no set of cases, no matter how large, is likely to deal satisfactorily with the complaint. (p. 37)

Gall et al. (1996) suggested three strategies for researchers to use in assisting subsequent readers with determining the generalizability of findings from a particular situation to other situations:

1. Provide thorough descriptions of the participants and contexts comprising the case so that interested readers can apply the findings to similar situations.

2. Explain how a selected case is representative of a general phenomenon.

3. Use a multiple case design and conduct cross-case analyses to assist the reader in determining generalizability.

Merriam (1998) also recommended using data from several cases, rather than subunits or subcases embedded within the same case, and doing cross-case analyses to provide a more compelling interpretation of the

findings. Miles and Huberman (1994), other noted authors in the area of qualitative research, corroborated Merriam's recommendation: "By looking at a range of similar and contrasting cases, we can understand a single-case finding, grounding it by specifying how and where, and, if possible, why it carries on as it does. We can strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (p. 29). Thus, in order to strengthen the external validity and generalizability of this dissertation, the researcher studied four different Connecticut school districts and subsequently compared the findings in each with those in the other three districts using the constant comparative method.

Constant Comparative Method

Many types of qualitative research use the constant comparative method for data analysis (Merriam, 1998). Glaser and Strauss (1967), noted sociologists, developed the method in the 1960s as a means of developing grounded sociological theory. Beginning with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or a document, the researcher compares this incident with

another from the same set of data or from another set of data. The researcher formulates a theory by constantly making comparisons within and between sets of data. By integrating and refining the categories and properties of the data, the researcher derives a theory or several related theories. "The constant comparative method is a research design for multidata sources, which is like analytic induction in that the formal analysis begins early in the study and is nearly completed by the end of data collection" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 66). Gall et al. (1996) elaborated on this further:

> The term *constant* highlights the fact that the process of comparison and revision of categories [of data] is repeated until satisfactory closure is achieved. Using constant comparison, the researcher clarifies the meaning of each category, creates sharp distinctions between categories, and decides which categories are most important to the study. (pp. 566-567)

For this dissertation, the constant comparative method provided a framework for structuring and analyzing data.

A significant outcome of case study research is the discovery of constructs or themes within the data. "Multiple-case data also can be analyzed to detect relational or causal patterns" (Gall et al., 1996, p. 567). Thus, collecting data and using the constant

comparative method for four Connecticut school districts permitted checking for constructs or themes across cases in this research.

Data Collection

Yin (1994) concluded that there were six sources of evidence for case studies: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Interviewing is a common means of collecting qualitative data. Occasionally, researchers collect all data for a study through interviews.

"The most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another" (Merriam, 1998, p. 71). Seidman (1998) emphasized the relevance of interviewing as a data collection technique for research in education: "If the researcher's goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry" (pp. 4-5). Yin (1994) similarly indicated:

> Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about

> human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. (p. 85)

In completing this dissertation, the researcher employed the focused interview technique. The researcher met with 19 interviewees for a short period of time (approximately 1 hour) and asked each interviewee a set of prepared but open-ended questions. The interviews were conversational in manner to allow each interviewee the freedom to express his or her opinion without structure or reservation. One additional interviewee returned a completed questionnaire via mail. The interviews were then transcribed in order to provide documentation for comparative analysis.

The number of interviews to be conducted for the research to be considered valid arose as a question. Seidman (1998) listed two criteria to answer this question: sufficiency and saturation. By sufficiency Seidman meant the number of interviewees should adequately reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that readers, who were outside the research, could connect with those who were included in the sample. The other criterion, saturation,

is more subjective. Seidman meant that the researcher would know that he had conducted enough interviews when he began to repeatedly hear the same information from the interviewees. Addressing Seidman's criteria was one of the reasons that this researcher conducted multiple interviews in four Connecticut school districts.

The other reason to conduct multiple interviews at multiple school districts was to enhance the internal validity and reliability of this research. Multiple sources of information led to a greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied--the school business administrator's background in the field of education. Yin (1994) defined internal validity as "establishing a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are shown to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships" and reliability as "demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results" (p. 33). Thus, the intent of conducting multiple interviews at multiple school districts was to corroborate evidence in order to establish both the causality of the relationships being studied and the repeatability of the study.

Data Analysis

This researcher employed a software package, the Ethnograph™ (version 5.08), to assist with data analysis. The first version of this software became available in 1985. "The Ethnograph is a collection of procedures designed to enhance and facilitate the process of qualitatiave data analysis" (Seidel, 1998, p. 5). Having transcribed and edited the interviews, the Ethnograph™ software assisted this researcher with organizing, coding, manipulating, and analyzing the data. The purpose of using this software was to provide more thorough qualitative data analysis by using a personal computer to examine a greater number of factual connections within the data in a given period of time. The software provided for smooth handling of data files and documents, such as interview transcripts and field notes.

The Interviewees

The State of Connecticut's Department of Education classifies Connecticut's school districts into nine educational reference groups based on socioeconomic factors. Each of the four school districts utilized in

this study represented a different educational reference group. The four school districts ranged in enrollment from 4,000 to 15,000 students attending 5 to 20 school buildings in their respective districts. Table 3 indicates the composition of the group of interviews. This group represented a reasonable cross section of the administrators with whom a school business official would interact in the normal course of conducting his or her district responsibilities.

Coding the Data

The Ethnograph™ provided the capability to number every line in the transcription of an interview. Having numbered every line in the 20 interviews, this researcher then proceeded to code sections of each interview with a preliminary set of codes that closely followed the research questions. The initial coding permitted simple searches of all interviews based on single codes. It quickly became apparent that additional coding might permit more in-depth analysis, allowing other qualities to emerge from the data.

The researcher made three additional passes through the versions of the transcripts in which the lines had

Table 3

Interviewees Categorized by Job Function

Interviewee's Job Function	Number of Interviewees
Superintendent	2
Other Central Office	6
Elementary Principal[a]	7
Middle School Principal	2
High School Principal	2
Other[b]	1

[a]One of the principals was the principal of an elementary magnet school.

[b]One interviewee was a current Board of Education member.

been previously numbered. First, the researcher coded all interviews based on whether the incumbent school business official came from education or from outside education. Second, the researcher coded all interviews based on where the interviewee worked in relation to the school business official. The researcher used two additional codes, *proximity close* and *proximity remote*, to establish this relationship. Third, the researcher coded all interviews based on the job function that the interviewee performed in the respective school districts. Table 3 above shows the job functions that the researcher used.

The additional coding permitted the researcher to perform multiple code searches. Code words were combined using Boolean relationships. For example, the responses pertaining to "financial skills and elementary principals and incumbents that were former educators" could easily be performed using the multiple code search procedures of the Ethnograph™. The researcher's coding structure has been included in the appendix to this document. The results that are described in the next chapter clearly

showed that multiple code searches provided greater insight into the data.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Sielke's (1995) previously cited statement indicated that school business administrators' job performance progressed along a continuum of skills--that is, from technical skills to human relations skills to the highest level, conceptual skills. Sielke observed: "There appears to be a more willing acceptance for the [school] business administrator to perform at the conceptual skill level if s/he is an educator" (p. 37). Sielke considered conceptual skills to include long-term planning linking financial resources to educational goals, shared decision making, consensus building strategies and policy making. Kouzes and Posner (1995) defined leadership as the art of mobilizing others to seek shared aspirations. Combining these two ideas produced this dissertation's problem question: Can a school business administrator without prior experience in the field of education provide leadership at the highest level, the conceptual level, to

his or her school district? The following discussion recounts and summarizes the feedback from 20 interviews with constituent administrators in four Connecticut school districts.

As a standard procedure in summarizing the feedback, the researcher moved from the general to the particular in evaluating the transcripts of the interviews. After an analysis of the responses in each general category, the researcher considered whether or not the incumbent school business official in a given school district was an experienced educator or came from outside education, such as the private sector. Next, the researcher considered the physical working proximity of the interviewee to the given school business official--in other words, whether or not the interviewee and the school business official worked in the same physical location. Then, the researcher considered the organizational relationship by categorizing and analyzing the same responses based on four relationships of the interviewee to the school business official: superintendent or superior, other central office administrator (peer), elementary principal (remote peer), and middle school and high school principals (remote

peers). Figure 2 depicts the strategy for assessing the feedback from the interviews.

Technical Skills

This researcher defined technical skills as financial prowess, knowledge of laws pertaining to public education, control the school district's support functions--for example, student transportation or food service, proficiency with computers, including their use for instructional purposes and analytical abilities.

Financial Prowess

Interviews about this skill involved discussions about school business officials' abilities to manage the day-to-day and cyclical financial processes of a school district. The responses to questions in this category varied from no difference to clearly discernible differences based upon the background of the school business official. A consistent theme throughout the interviews, regardless of the interviewees' perception of a given question, was that there would be a distinct advantage to understanding the culture of schools. Not unexpectedly, some interviewees explained that someone who had experience in education should have a greater

	Relationship[-1,-2,-3]	SBO's Education Background		
School Business Official's Skills	**All Responses Incumbent[-1], Proximity[-2], or Organization[-3]**	**No Experience in Education**	**Education Courses Only**	**Education Courses & Work Experience in Education**
Technical Skills				
Financial Prowess – demonstrates adequate knowledge of mathematics related to accounting and general business				
Manages Annual Budget – ensures that actual spending does not exceed planned amounts				
Knowledge of Law – understands contracts and legal requirements of school districts, e.g. competitive bidding				
Analytical Ability – deductively applies mathematical techniques to real life situations				
Understands Information Technology – applies and uses computer and network technologies for school district operations				
Control Support Functions – keeps processes that support education (transportation, food service, etc.) in check				
Interacts with Suppliers – represents the school district to organizations providing materials or service				
Human Relations Skills				
Interacts with Constituents – regularly meets and communicates with other district administrators				
Functions as Focal Point for Information – provides clearinghouse for myriad types of information used in operating a school district				
Promotes Mutual Understanding – explains the operational requirements of the business office to other district administrators and conversely seeks to understand how each school works				
Advocates Shared Decision-making – presents information openly to other district administrators in order to jointly decide on the course of action to pursue				
Accurately and Professionally Communicates with District's Stakeholders – makes informative presentations in public				

Figure 2. Strategy for assessing feedback regarding school business official's skills

Leadership Skills				
Establishes Direction – understands and articulates well the district's vision of the future				
Aligns People & Resources – communicates with followers ensuring understanding of the vision, promotes coalitions for achieving the vision, and ensures the allocation of the requisite resources for achieving the vision				
Motivates & Inspires –keeps other administrators and staff moving in the right direction despite obstacles to change				
Has Credibility – senses and understands the collective unspoken feelings of other administrators and staff members and articulates them for the group				
Emphasizes Outcomes – through personal actions turns aspirations into achievements				

1-Incumbent means current SBO was Educator or Non-Educator
2-Proximity means physically in the same location or remote from School Business Official
3-Organization means the interviewee's position in district's organizational hierarchy

Figure 2 (continued)

appreciation of school culture. One interviewee, however, explained that running the school business office is far different from running a school building, thereby minimizing the importance of a background in education.

When the incumbent school business official was not an educator, most interviewees perceived no difference in financial skills or favored the noneducator. When the incumbent school business official was an educator, the interviewees perceived that those without a background in education, usually referred to as a business background, were overly concerned with financial details and did not exhibit an understanding of school culture.

Those interviewees who worked in close proximity to the school business official had a more positive opinion of school business officials from outside education, but they still stressed the importance of understanding the school culture. Those interviewees who worked remotely from the school business official had more varied responses regarding financial prowess, but these interviewees placed far more emphasis on understanding school culture as a prerequisite to becoming a school business official.

Superintendents of schools saw fewer differences in financial skills when considering school business officials' backgrounds, but they still saw a lack of understanding of school culture as a hurdle that needed to be overcome to function as an effective school business official. Other central office administrators generally offered more positive feedback about school business officials who came from outside education. These administrators indicated that the following skills and traits were better in school business administrators with business backgrounds: confidence with numbers, willingness to be more flexible with categorizing expenses, stronger reporting skills, and broader thinking. But this group also emphasized the need for understanding school culture.

Elementary school principals exhibited an approximately evenly split variation in their opinions on this subject. Approximately half saw no difference in skills, but the other half saw a preoccupation with financial details exhibited by those with a business background. Again, the importance of understanding school culture emphatically was pervasive throughout the conversations. Middle school principals and high school

principals who were interviewed for this research did not perceive any difference in financial skills based upon the school business officials' background.

Knowledge of Education Law

Questioning in this category sought to determine if a school business official's background predicted a better knowledge of education law. Feedback centered on school business officials' dealings in the legal arena. While knowledge of education law was the prevalent subject of interviews, one legal area, special education law, emerged as particularly relevant to the general category. Because of the emergence of this specialty topic, the researcher sought responses to questions about this area in many of the interviews. The consistent theme throughout the interviews was that initially it would be difficult for someone without a background in education to be sufficiently familiar with education law. One interviewee, who differed, emphasized that a background in education was not a guarantee that a school business official would have expertise in education law because previous experience in education may not include experience with education law.

When the incumbent had a background in education, interviewees gave a slight advantage to school business officials with a background in education. These interviewees thought that simply being associated with education provided at least a minimum sensitivity to education-related issues. When the incumbent did not have a background in education, the interviewees thought that a lack of prior education experience was a disadvantage. These interviewees considered this to be a rapidly changing area for most school administrators. Any initial shortcomings could be overcome by a school business official who was willing to devote the necessary time to learning the nuances of education law. Experience with education law was the surest way to become knowledgeable. Administrators in large school districts had less experience with education law than those in smaller ones because boards of education referred legal issues directly to the board's counsel.

Regardless of whether or not the interviewees were physically remote from the school business official, they thought a background in education would provide the school business official with an advantage over someone without the education background. Those interviewees who

worked in the same physical location as the school business official considered continuing experience with legal issues in education as the key contributor to overcoming an initial disadvantage. These interviewees also pointed out that special education law did not have an easy parallel for an individual with only private sector business experience.

Superintendents thought that experience in education was the key to understanding education law. Other central office administrators, acknowledging that experience with the legal aspects of education gives an advantage to school business officials with an education background, thought that learning education law required more interaction between a school business official without an education background and them, but that it could be learned. Elementary school principals expressed more divergent opinions, but they predominantly gave an advantage to school business officials with an education background. These principals emphasized that prior experience in education may not have included experience with education law, such as in a large school district with its own legal staff. Thus, they did not consider previous education experience to be the surefire answer

to the need for expertise in education law. Again, middle school principals and high school principals who were interviewed perceived far less difference in legal skill based on comparing the school business officials' prior work experience. Only one of four principals interviewed even commented on the lack of prior education experience in a school business official's background as a possible disadvantage.

Controlling Support Functions

The questions in this category discussed the support functions within a school district, such as student transportation and food service, and they asked the interviewees to try to compare a school business official's ability to manage them. Feedback in this category was mixed. Interviewees indicated that a better understanding of educational issues permitted school business officials with an education background to function more effectively when controlling a school district's support functions. Other interviewees who gave an advantage to school business officials with a private sector background thought that these individuals were more efficient in controlling support functions.

However, the majority of interviewees saw no difference in controlling support functions when the school business official's background was the comparison criterion.

When the incumbent school business official was a former educator, most interviewees perceived that he or she did a better job controlling support functions because he or she demonstrated a greater sensitivity to the nuances of education. As stated above, the majority of interviewees saw no differences with this comparison. However, only one interviewee from this group perceived that there was no difference in a school business official's performance controlling support functions when that school business official was a former educator. When the incumbent school business administrator came from the private sector, interviewees thought that he or she was just more efficient at controlling support functions.

Predominantly, the interviewees saw little difference in controlling a school district's support functions when the incumbent school business official came from the private sector. When the interviewees were located remotely from the school business official, they most often saw no difference in performance controlling a

school district's support functions. Where the remote peers did see a difference in performance, they gave the advantage to the school business official with the education background because he or she could more easily anticipate problems and provide immediate solutions to the problems.

When the interviewees worked in the same physical location as the school business official, their viewpoints were split regarding who did a better job controlling a school district's support functions. Those who favored the business background indicated better organizational skills as a key advantage. Those who favored the education background cited better understanding of education issues as the primary advantage.

The two superintendents who were interviewed were split in their viewpoints with each favoring the background of his incumbent school business official. Other central office peers were also split in their viewpoints, but these interviewees were split three ways with numbers favoring the education background and the private sector background and another third citing no appreciable difference in performance. Elementary

principals clearly favored the school business officials with the education background, again because of their understanding of educational issues. Middle school principals and high school principals mostly saw no difference in performance based upon the school business official's background. However, one high school principal thought that performance was circumstantial--that is, based upon the environment with which the school business official dealt.

Computer Proficiency

In this category the researcher asked how the district's business office used computers and sought to determine the interviewee's perception of the school business official's competence with computer technology. Despite differences of opinion about computer proficiency based on a school business official's previous work experience, two themes manifested themselves in the feedback from these interviews. First, although perceived by many to be lagging behind the private sector, computer usage in education has accelerated substantially in the past 10 to 15 years, thereby making comparative assessments of school business officials'

proficiency difficult at best. Second, many interviewees thought that the school business officials' personal interest in computers made a large difference in their proficiency with them, regardless of his or her previous work experience. In one case where the school district was a large district, the interviewees were less able to offer an opinion because another department within the municipality handled all affairs related to computers.

When the incumbent school business official was an educator, if the interviewee did cite an advantage, the educator had the advantage. However, the interviewees thought that the level of the individual school district organization's acceptance of computers played a large part in determining the respective school business official's proficiency. When the incumbent school business official came from the private sector, the interviewees clearly gave the advantage to those school business officials without an education background.

When the interviewee worked in a different location or building than the school business official, he or she gave the advantage to the school business official with the educational background, but the growing acceptance of computers in school districts made comparisons difficult

because the interviewee would be comparing different periods of time. When the interviewee worked in proximity to the school business official, he or she clearly favored the one with the business background, but these interviewees also cited the increasing supply of technology as a cause of growing demand for and use of computers. These interviewees also thought that the school business official's personal interest in computers was a strong contributor to his or her proficiency.

Superintendents were split as to which background was more proficient with computers, but again they cited personal interest as a contributing factor to proficiency. Other central office administrators predominantly thought that school business officials with a business background exhibited greater proficiency with computers, but they thought that the context of time and directives from higher in the organization were very important accelerators of interest in computers. Elementary principals thought that the evolution of technology was the primary factor in the increasing use of computers by school business officials. Middle school principals and high school principals perceived little to no difference in proficiency based upon prior work

experience. Again, this group saw the progression of time and personal interest as keys to increased usage of computers by school business officials.

Involvement with the Instructional Use of Computers

Questions in this category sought to determine if the school business official had any involvement with the school district's use of computers for instruction. If the school business official was involved, the researcher asked if his or her work background made a difference. Interviewees generally indicated that the school business official's background did not make a difference in his or her involvement with computers for instructional purposes. The interviewees also perceived that previous experience in education, if it could provide a greater understanding of educational needs, was an advantage for a school business official. Experience was also time dependent because greater use of computers both in education and, generally, would give an advantage to those school business officials who served in the position most recently. The time dependency could negate any preference or advantage pertaining to background. In

a large school district, the municipality with which it was affiliated provided information technology support. Most school business officials' involvement with computers for instructional purposes was limited to financial and acquisition decisions and to infrastructure and network installation. Other than in a large school district, the school business official had some personnel responsibilities for computer technicians. School business officials with a background in education were more involved in the day-to-day operations related to computers for instructional purposes. School business officials with a business background had broader experience with computer technology and, generally, had broader responsibilities related to technology.

When the incumbent school business official had previous experience in education, he or she was not involved with developing curriculum that employs computers, but was involved with decisions related to the acquisition of computers and with facilities-related decisions involving installation of communication networks. When the incumbent school business official had previous experience in the private sector, involvement with computers for instruction was limited to

managing the installation of equipment and communications networks. One interviewee commented that the school business official with the business background was far more adept at managing such issues. The limitation most often attributed to school business officials without previous experience in education was the gap in understanding the requirements for instruction.

When the interviewee worked in proximity to the school business official, he or she indicated that the school business official's involvement with computers for instructional purposes was limited to acquisition and installation. There was one exception to the previous statement. In that case, the school business official had been a mathematics teacher and had previously taught computers as a separate subject. This school business official had more involvement with the instructional use of computers. When the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, they unanimously indicated that the school business official had no involvement with developing curriculum. Again, these interviewees indicated that the school business officials' involvement was limited to acquisition and installation decisions.

When the interviewee was superintendent of schools, he indicated that the school business official's involvement with computers for instruction was limited to implementation, but that the school business official needed to work closely with those educators who were developing curriculum. When the interviewee was another central office administrator, he or she indicated that the school business official had no involvement with developing curriculum that used computers, with the one exception mentioned earlier concerning the school business official who had been a mathematics teacher previously. These interviewees frequently indicated that the school business official had responsibility for managing the computer technicians in the respective school districts. When the interviewees were elementary school principals, they indicated they universally indicated that the school business official had no involvement with curriculum development employing computers, and that the school business officials' involvement was limited to the installation of the computers. When the interviewee was a middle school principal or a high school principal, he or she indicated that the school business official had no involvement with

curriculum development employing computers, but that a school business official with an education background had been involved in discussions related to educational needs regarding the use of computers for instruction.

Analytical Skills

In this category, the researcher asked the interviewees to compare school business officials based on the interviewee's perception of the school business official's analytical abilities. Most interviewees saw no appreciable difference in analytical skills based on whether or not a school business official had previous work experience in education. If an interviewee did express that there was an advantage, slightly more favored the school business official with the education background than favored those with a business background. One interviewee indicated that an initial difference favoring school business officials with an education background would disappear as a school business official with a business background gained experience, learned the school jargon, and became familiar with the school culture. Interestingly, when answering this question, a number of interviewees introduced the factor of

personality or a personality trait in citing differences. These interviewees thought that personality might play a larger role in any differences rather than previous experience in education.

When the incumbent school business official did not have previous work experience in education, most interviewees cited no appreciable difference in analytical skills. These interviewees saw the circumstances with which a school business official dealt and time in service as accelerators of the development of analytical skills. One interviewee expected that a school business official with a business background would have better analytical skills but did not find that to be the case. Another interviewee gave the advantage to school business officials with a background in education. When the incumbent school business official had previously worked in education, there was a divergence of opinion about which school business official had better analytical skills. More interviewees favored the school business official with the education background, but one gave the advantage to the school business official with the business background, and one interviewee saw no difference based upon background. One interviewee

introduced the personality of the school business official as a contributing factor to analytical skills. This interviewee gave the advantage to the school business official with the background in education.

When the interviewees worked in proximity to the school business official, most did not perceive a difference in analytical skill based on prior work experience. When these interviewees did perceive an advantage, they more frequently gave the advantage to the school business official with the business background because of preparation and training. When the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, most perceived no appreciable difference in analytical skills based upon previous work experience. When these interviewees did perceive an advantage, they more frequently gave the advantage to the school business official with the education background because of a greater understanding of issues related to education and a greater willingness to adapt to situations.

The two superintendents' opinions differed from each other. One saw no difference in analytical ability between school business officials with the education or business background, but this interviewee thought that

the business background should be better because of a quantitative approach to training in the private sector. The other superintendent clearly gave the advantage to the school business official with the education background because of a less rigid approach to resolving issues. When the interviewees were other central office administrators, they were evenly split in their opinions. They either saw no difference in analytical skill based upon previous work experience, or they gave the advantage to the school business official with the business background. When the interviewees were elementary school principals, there was a divergence of opinion. Most interviewees saw no difference in analytical ability based on previous work experience, followed closely by those giving an advantage to the school business official with an education background. When the interviewees were middle school principals and high school principals, most saw no appreciable difference in analytical skills based on previous work experience. One interviewee perceived an advantage for school business officials with an education background, but this interviewee indicated that the advantage was based on personal traits rather than on previous work experience.

Human Relations Skills

This researcher defined human relations skills as those abilities that permit a school business official to function effectively in dealing with his constituents on a day-to-day basis. Interview questioning sought feedback on areas such as the discussion of topics other than finance in one-on-one meetings, whether or not the school business official was considered a resource for information, effectiveness in formally presenting information in public meetings, visibility to other administrators in their respective school buildings, and engendering mutual respect from the constituents. It is worth noting that the last topic, engendering mutual respect from the constituents, became the category of questioning that facilitated the researcher's transition into discussing the third level of skills, the conceptual level.

Consideration of Topics Other than Finance in Personal Meetings

The researcher's questions in this category pertained to the frequency of face-to-face meetings between the interviewee and school business official, the

specificity of topics discussed, and time spent trying to understand each other's perspectives. The interviewees stated that school business officials with either background were almost equally likely to have regular meetings with them. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees cited financial or budget-related issues as the central theme of these meetings. The interviewees indicated that in these meetings the school business official would often make some attempt to understand the interviewee's requirements. Where the attempt to understand the interviewee's needs was positively perceived, the interviewee indicated that the school business official was capable of understanding education and most often had a background in education. Where the attempt to understand the interviewee's needs was perceived negatively, the interviewee thought that the school business official lacked sensitivity to education and was only interested in financial issues. In one school district, multiple interviewees indicated that the school business official was a part of the administrative team and that the decision to operate the district as a team was the superintendent's management philosophy.

When the incumbent school business official had a background in education, the interviewees indicated more often than not that they had regular meetings with the school business official and that the meetings considered general topics other than the district's finances. More specifically, a superintendent with a school business official who had a background in education thought that background made little difference. When the incumbent school business official had a business background, the interviewees indicated that they had regular meetings with the school business official, but that these meetings more frequently focused on the budget or another financial topic. One interviewee in this category emphatically indicated that the school business official with a business background had difficulty understanding educational needs.

When the interviewees worked in the same physical location as the school business official, they saw little difference in conducting day-to-day affairs based on the school business official's background. Two observations deserved mention. One interviewee thought that a school business official with a business background had to work harder to understand educational needs, and another

thought that a school business official with a business background was not even interested in educational needs, but, rather, only in the "bottom line." When the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, they perceived that regular meetings were devoted to financial issues, and that they had to spend more time explaining educational needs to school business officials with a business background because this individual was more likely to be bottom line driven. They perceived that school business officials with a background in education were less rigid.

Superintendents met regularly with the school business official, discussed a variety of topics, attempted to understand each other's requirements, and saw little difference based on the school business official's background. However, one superintendent indicated that those school business officials with a business background were not as comfortable or visible in the school buildings as those who had a background in education. Other central office administrators had slightly more regular meetings with the school business official than did not do so. These meetings tended to be focused on a single area of interest, district finances.

Overwhelmingly, these interviewees described mutual attempts to understand needs. In this category, the school business official with a business background most often focused on financial issues. Although slightly more indicated that they did not meet regularly with the school business official, elementary principals more favorably perceived school business officials with a background in education, describing those with a business background as having difficulty understanding educational needs. Middle school principals and high school principals similarly did not meet regularly and perceived school business officials with business backgrounds as having a more difficult challenge understanding educational needs.

A Resource for Information

Questions in this category sought to determine whether or not the interviewee considered a school business official to be a trusted source of information within the school district. The interviewees considered school business officials with either background to be trusted sources of financial information. One interviewee indicated that the school business official

with a background in education was a trusted source of any district-related information. Another interviewee explicitly favored a school business official with a background in education because of his knowledge of educational issues. Another interviewee favored the school business official with a business background because of his responsiveness to requests for information. The size of the district, in terms of enrollment, buildings, and organizational structure, could have been a factor in answering questions in this category. In a larger school district, there were multiple levels of organization within many departments, including the business function, making this question difficult to answer. One interviewee in this district specifically rejected the usefulness of the district's business function as a source of information.

When the incumbent school business official had a background in education, the interviewees indicated that the business official was always a trusted source of financial information, and one interviewee further indicated that he or she was a trusted source of all district-related information. One interviewee in this category indicated that the school business official with

a business background was less apt to drop what he was doing and assist with the request for information. When the incumbent school business official did not have a background in education, the interviewees indicated that he or she was a trusted source of financial information, but they cited insight into educational issues as very important. In the large school district, the interviewees considered the school business official not to be a trusted source of information because the multilayered management structure made access to all information difficult. Accurate information had to come from the highest level of management.

When the interviewees worked in the same physical location as the school business official, they indicated that he or she was a trusted source of information related to financial issues but that insights into educational issues are extremely valuable. When the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, they considered those with a background in education to be a trusted source of information on a broader range of questions and issues, but these issues still had a financial relevance. These interviewees

cited responsiveness to questions as a drawback to school business officials with a business background.

Superintendents considered the school business official to be a trusted source of information, but they indicated that they would determine who on their administrative staffs should answer specific questions. Regardless of background, other central office administrators trusted the school business official as a source of information on financial issues. Again, they cited insight on educational issues as helpful. With the exception of the large school district, elementary school principals found the school business official, regardless of background, to be a trusted source of financial information. In the large district, the business department was not a trusted source of information for elementary school principals. Middle school principals and high school principals indicated that they were not reluctant to ask the school business official for information related to financial issues, and that he or she was a trusted source. Again, in the large district, these principals did not seek information from the business department because multiple management layers

required them to seek it at a higher level in the organization.

Presentation Skills

In this category, the researcher asked the interviewees if the school business official made presentations at public meetings and if he or she did, whether or not the presentations were well received. The interviewees did not consider the school business official's background to be a significant factor in his or her ability to make a cogent presentation at public meetings, such as board of education meetings. However, individual interviewees mentioned specific situations that could be relevant. One interviewee described a school business official who used too many accounting terms in his presentation, which was not well received. Another interviewee mentioned that there were two levels of receptiveness by public bodies--the public level and the "behind closed doors" level. Another interviewee indicated that local politics was a sometimes difficult challenge for the school business official's presentations, thereby substantiating this opinion. Still another interviewee thought that the school

business official with a business background was better at logically constructing presentations. Last, one interviewee stated that a school business official with a background in education had a greater sensitivity to "classroom issues."

When the incumbent school business official had a business background, interviewees stated that making formal presentations to town bodies was a usual part of the school business official's responsibility and that the presentations were received well by the respective boards. These interviewees cited two instances where the school business official with the business background was received better than the one with the background in education because of better organization of the presentation and a higher level of respect for the individual school business official. When the incumbent school business official had a background in education, the interviewees thought that the background made him or her more sensitive to educational issues. One interviewee indicated that over-use of accounting language diminished the level of positive reception of the school business official with a business background.

When the interviewees worked in the same physical location as the school business official, they thought that the town bodies usually received his or her presentations positively, with the exception of over-use of accounting terms. These interviewees explained that often the material that the school business official presented affected the reception, such as being perceived negatively when presenting a budget deficit. When the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, they thought that town bodies usually positively perceived his or her presentation, but that presentation styles differed based on the school business official's background. They thought that the school business officials with a background in education exhibited a better understanding of educational issues, but that those with a business background organized their presentations more effectively.

Superintendents' observations differed based on the superintendent's management philosophy. One superintendent indicated that he made all presentations related to finance in his district. The other superintendent more readily delegated presentations to his staff, and he saw the school business official with

the business background as being received better by the town bodies, but only after he had gained credibility. Other central office administrators commented that negatively received presentations were more the outcome of the material than of the presenter. Elementary school principals perceived a lack of sensitivity and appreciation for educational issues as a detriment for school business officials with only a background in business. Middle school principals and high school principals thought that the school business officials' presentations were well received regardless of their background.

Respect as an Administrator

In this category, the researcher asked the interviewees if the school business administrator was a credible spokesperson for the district's administration or perceived simply as the district's *bean counter*. The term *bean counter* is the vernacular, and it is often a demeaning description of an employee who performs bookkeeping functions without sensitivity to the organization's activities. A second question asked if the school business official was afforded a higher degree

of respect as an administrator as opposed to being simply the district's *bean counter* who discussed financial topics. The interviewees' feedback in this category pertained to the respect with which a school business administrator was treated when he or she made formal presentations. The questioning did not consider whether or not the constituents and the school business administrators treated each other respectfully in their daily interactions. Feedback in this category should also be considered as the transition to the highest level on Sielke's (1995) continuum, the conceptual level. This is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The interviewees indicated that school business officials, regardless of their background, often were not offered the opportunity to speak on topics not related to business affairs because one's position within the school district's hierarchy most often determines the subjects on which one will present. For example, the human resources administrator presents topics related to collective bargaining, and the special education administrator presents topics related to special education. The interviewees indicated that board of education members and members of other town bodies

treated the school business official with the same respect as they treated other administrators when presenting topics in his or her realm of responsibility. These topics included business or finance, school facilities and construction, and even information technology as previously mentioned, but they did not include instruction or curriculum. When the school business official was not afforded the same level of respect, some personal trait other than his or her background was detrimental.

When the incumbent school business official had a background in education, the interviewees considered his or her "sense of the classroom" to be an advantage in garnering respect from town officials. These interviewees indicated that school business officials with a business background would most likely not present topics other than those related to business or finance, so gauging respect was probably not necessary. When the incumbent school business official had a business background, the interviewees indicated that respect from town officials had to be earned over time. The interviewees indicated that such school business officials rarely had the opportunity to present topics

other than business-related ones. Ironically, one interviewee in this group cited the case of a former educator who was not treated respectfully by the board of education in his community.

When the interviewees worked in the same physical location as the school business official, they indicated that a school business official with a business background had to earn respect, but that most often he or she could do so. They also stated that school business officials with a background in education received more respect from town bodies because of a credibility advantage. In other words, the former educators' knowledge of what happens in the classroom commanded respect sooner. When the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, they indicated that the school business official with the background in education had more respect on a wider array of topics than the school business official with the business background whose field of expertise was perceived to be limited to business and financial topics.

Superintendents' opinions were split on this question. They agreed that municipal officials treated the school business official with respect regardless of

his or her background, but that the topic that the school business official presented affected the manner in which the municipal officials treated him or her. Other central office administrators were far more positive about how town officials treated a school business official with a business background. They indicated that the level of respect was the same regardless of the school business official's background, with one exception. One interviewee thought that the school business official with the background in education received a higher level of respect. Elementary school principals indicated that the school business official with the background in education received more respect on a broader range of topics. They thought that the school business official with the business background received respect only on financial topics. Middle school principals and high school principals indicated that municipal officials gave the same level of respect to school business officials regardless of their background. They thought that school business officials with a background in education were closer to classroom issues than those with only a background in business. They also indicated that the position of school business official

most often limits the topics on which the school business official would be asked to present to business-related issues.

Conceptual Level

As cited previously, Sielke (1995) considered conceptual level skills to include long-term planning linking financial resources to educational goals, shared decision making, consensus building strategies, and policy making. Sielke stated, "There appears to be a more willing acceptance for the [school] business administrator to perform at the conceptual skill level if s/he is an educator" (p. 37). To explore Sielke's statement, this researcher asked interviewees generalized questions about whether or not his or her school district had a published vision for education in the district, about the respective school business official's ability to articulate that vision, and about the respective school business official's ability to motivate others to seek that vision.

Published Vision Statement

The researcher asked the interviewees if their school district had a published vision statement. The 19

interviewees who answered this question indicated that their school district had a published vision statement. Some interpreted the question to mean a mission statement for their school district. A vision statement (Kouzes & Posner, 1995) has been defined as a directional statement about an ideal future state of existence for an organization. A mission statement (Nanus, 1992) has been defined as a statement of an organization's purpose, in other words, what the organization has been established to accomplish. Because the differences in interpretation were not considered necessarily critical to this research, this researcher did not probe this issue further. In all 19 cases, the vision statement was known both externally and internally. Much of the knowledge about the vision statement depended upon where the school district was in the process of developing or publishing it. If the school district had recently published the vision statement, there was far more excitement about it. If the school district published the vision statement further in the past, there was more skepticism about its acceptance and relevance to operating the school district. In a large school district, the interviewees perceived that the vision statement was more for form

rather than a future condition that was sought. They indicated that the statement was read before every Board of Education meeting, but was not discussed beyond its initial conception and was not connected to the budget or finance in any way. In three of the four cases studied, the school business official had little involvement with constructing the school district's vision statement.

In the cases where the incumbent school business official had a background in education, all interviewees stated that their school district did have a vision statement. One interviewee discussed the vision statement and compared the involvement with it based on the background of the school business official. The comparison indicated that where that school district was in the development process for its vision statement probably had more to do with the school business official's involvement in it than his or her background did. In the cases where the incumbent school business official did not have a background in education, all interviewees indicated that their school district did have a vision statement, and that it was at least read publicly at official meetings. The interviewees from a

large district expressed skeptically that the reading of the vision statement was for form.

Where the interviewees worked in the same location as the school business official, all indicated that their district had a vision statement, but some questioned whether or not the vision statement was widely known and doubted its usage beyond simple publication. Where the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, all interviewees indicated that their school district had a vision statement. Those interviewees from a large school district were more skeptical about the vision statement's use and effectiveness. Some interviewees from a medium sized school district were more positive about the development and publication process for their district's vision statement, indicating a sense of pride and accomplishment about it.

Two superintendents indicated that their school districts had published vision statements. All interviewees who were central office administrators indicated that their school district had a published vision statement, although some expressed doubt about its pervasive use. All elementary school principals indicated that their district had a published vision

statement. Those principals in a large district expressed more skepticism about its use. Those principals in a medium-sized district where the publication of the vision statement had recently occurred were very enthusiastic about the development of the vision statement. All middle school principals and high school principals who were interviewed indicated that their district had a published vision statement. Those principals in a district where the vision statement's development was done recently exhibited more excitement than those principals in a district where the development and publication were completed less recently.

Because all school districts that were considered had some form of a published vision statement, discerning the school business official's involvement in its development and ability to articulate it proved to be an indication of the school business official's ability to function at the conceptual level.

Ability to Articulate the School District's Vision of the Future

Having established that all school districts considered had some vision of the future, whether calling

it specifically a vision statement or in some cases a mission statement, the researcher asked interviewees questions about the school business officials' capabilities to tie specific resources to achieving the school district's vision of the future. Could the school business official explain what needed to be done and how the necessary resources should be put into place in order to achieve the vision? Was the school business official involved with instructional leadership activities within the district?

Interviewees indicated that school business officials who were former educators had more credibility than those who were not perceived to be educators when presenting topics related to instruction to boards of education, other public bodies, and the public. In Connecticut, school business officials who are former educators sometimes hold carry/hold/have the title of assistant superintendent for business as opposed to business manager, indicating that they had credentials and certification as an educator beyond the business function. Interviewees indicated that school business officials who are not former educators have a more difficult challenge overcoming other administrators'

perceptions that these school business officials are only "bottom line" or financially oriented. One interviewee observed that school business officials without a background in education must understand that education is a "people" industry rather than a "thing" industry. According to another interviewee, when a school business official without a background in education exhibited a willingness to understand people rather than numbers, he or she became more formidable because he or she was no longer reactionary. Affirming Sielke's (1995) contention, interviewees indicated that school business officials, particularly those without a background in education, do not seek and often avoid opportunities to present publicly topics other than those that are business related. Other interviewees indicated that local politics limits opportunities for school business officials, regardless of background, to present topics other than school district finances in public.

Where the incumbent school business official had a background in education, interviewees indicated that school business officials with a background in education clearly had an advantage when considering the school business official's credibility and ability to articulate

the school district's vision. In one school district, the school business official with a background in education had the title of assistant superintendent for business and finance, providing evidence of the advantage that this background brought with it. These interviewees stated that school business officials without a background in education most often were not given the opportunity to articulate the vision, and they doubted that the school business officials could do so because of the lack of background in education. In one case, the interviewee indicated that the school business official without a background in education was not even invited to the highest level staff meetings where important district issues were discussed. Where the incumbent school business official did not have a background in education, interviewees indicated that school business officials who had a background in education had a clear advantage in articulating the school district's vision because there was the expectation because they expected that he or she understood it. The interviewees indicated that the school business official without a background in education had a credibility challenge, at least initially. There was a general perception that business

people are numbers oriented and think rigidly. Thus, the lack of a background in education required a school business official to work to learn and understand the human dynamics of education. One interviewee cited a case where the school business official with a background in education irritated the audience in his presentation because of his lack of understanding of business processes. Multiple interviewees favored the business background if the school business official extended himself or herself to learn education. Local politics and school district organizational norms can restrict any school business official's opportunities to articulate the district's vision.

Where the interviewees worked in the same location as the school business official, they indicated that the business background was generally viewed less favorably than the education background. Multiple interviewees from the same district cited a case where a school business official with a business background took the necessary time to learn education and surpassed the performance of his predecessor with a background in education. Where the interviewees worked remotely from the school business official, they indicated that school

business officials with a background in education could articulate the school district's vision, and that they had more credibility when doing so. Political bodies and the general public generally viewed those closest to instruction as having the most credibility when discussing vision for the school district. Sometimes the organizational nuances and processes of the school district prohibited the school business official from articulating the district's vision. Sometimes by organizational design and sometimes by the school business official's choice, those school business officials without a background in education did not have articulating the school district's vision as part of their responsibilities. One interviewee cited the importance of recognizing that education is a "people" business.

Superintendents of schools indicated that school business officials with a background in education had at least an initial advantage in understanding and articulating the school district's vision for the future. Sometimes the district's processes excluded the school business official from opportunities to articulate the vision. One superintendent thought that school business

officials with a background in business had the potential to be more valuable contributors to achieving the district's vision if the school business official was willing to listen and learn about education and then apply disciplines learned in business to his or her work in the district. Other central office administrators thought that school business officials with a background in education could generally articulate the school district's vision of the future, given the opportunity to do so. These administrators thought that school business officials without a background in education were less likely to have the ability or the opportunity to articulate the district's vision of the future. One of these administrators noted an exception of a school business official with a background in business who immersed himself in education and then surpassed his predecessor's abilities. The predecessor was a former educator. Another interviewee initiated a discussion on the necessity of formal training for school business officials, regardless of their backgrounds. Elementary school principals favored school business officials with a background in education that would permit the school business official to participate more fully in the

district's day-to-day activities as well as its vision of the future. One of these interviewees cited the case of a school business official with a background in business who understood that education is about "people" resources and who could make the connection between the district's vision of the future and the resources necessary to achieve it. Another interviewee cited a case where the superintendent did not even invite the school business official to meetings where the school district's vision was developed. Still another of these interviewees did not think that developing the school district's vision should be part of the school business official's responsibilities. Middle school principals and high school principals perceived that school business officials with a background in education could articulate more credibly the district's vision because they were closer to instructional processes. School business officials with only a background in education had less credibility in articulating the district's vision of the future.

Ability to Motivate Others to Achieve the District's Vision of the Future

Next the researcher asked interviewees questions regarding the school business officials' ability to motivate other administrators, faculty, and staff to strive toward achieving the district's vision of the future. A subordinate question involved whether or not such motivational work was left to the superintendent of schools or to someone else within the district's administration.

Interviewees indicated that school business officials with a background in education were more likely to be asked to present the district's vision statement. However, most often the superintendent of schools or the assistant superintendent for instruction would handle this activity. One exception was a school business official who had the title of assistant superintendent for business and finance and had been involved with developing the school district's strategic plan. The interviewees thought that this school business official commanded enough respect and was articulate enough to present the district's vision statement and to motivate others toward achieving it. School business officials

without a background in education probably would not be asked to present the district's vision statement and probably could not do it. Multiple interviewees noted an exception of a school business official who had an engaging personality and prepared appropriately for presentations. They thought that he could motivate others toward achieving the district's vision.

Where the incumbent school business official was a former educator, interviewees thought that he or she could motivate others toward achieving the district's vision because he or she would have had greater exposure to educational issues, but opportunities to present the vision still may not have arisen for such school business officials. These interviewees indicated that when a school business official did not have a background in education, he or she would not be asked to present the district's vision statement because he or she would have less credibility with other staff members. Where the incumbent school business official did not have a background in education, interviewees thought that he or she could motivate staff members, excluding other administrators and faculty. Although the opportunity to present the vision statement may not have arisen often

for a school business official with a business background, interviewees in one district thought that the individual with the business background was better at motivating staff members because he had an engaging personality and a strong command of the relevant information.

Interviewees who worked in the same physical location as the school business official viewed the individual with the business background more favorably, indicating that personality and thorough preparation were key factors in his ability to motivate others. These interviewees generally perceived school business officials who were former educators more favorably than those with a business background. When these interviewed administrators were educators, they stated that they had to spend more time preparing the school business official with the business background for his presentations than they would spend with another former educator. Still, these interviewees indicated that opportunities to publicly motivate the other staff members did not arise frequently because these activities were left to the superintendent of schools or to the assistant superintendent for instruction. When the interviewees

worked remotely from the school business official, they viewed school business officials with the education background more favorably than those with the business background. They did not think that school business officials with a background in business could motivate others to achieve the district's vision of the future. Again, these interviewees did not think that such opportunities arose frequently.

Superintendents had mixed views regarding the school business official's ability to motivate others. One indicated that the school business official with the background in education could do so, but he probably did not have the opportunity to do so very often because the superintendent mostly did that work himself. The other superintendent was more positive about the school business official with the business background, citing his ability to learn the nuances of education quickly as well as his dedication to learning. This superintendent was less positive about school business officials with a background in education, explaining that in one case prior experiences and perceptions possibly interfered with an individual's presentation abilities. Other central office administrators viewed school business

officials with business backgrounds equally as favorably as those with backgrounds in education. Again, these interviewees thought that school business officials would have very limited opportunities to address the staff regarding the district's vision. Elementary school principals indicated that the school business official, regardless of the individual's background, would present the vision only as it pertains to finances to the faculty. These interviewees thought that the school business official with an education background could motivate the support staff, but that he or she would probably not be given that opportunity. They also thought that the school business official with the business background would only address fiscal matters when addressing the support staff. Middle school and high school principals thought that explaining the school district's vision would be left most often to the superintendent or the administrator responsible for instruction in the district. When a school business official had a background in education, there would be a greater possibility that he or she could motivate the staff, but again the probability of that happening was low.

Emergent Topics

Two topics emerged from the interviews that have direct relevance to the essential questions in this research. Multiple interviewees expounded on the need for school business officials to understand the culture of schools in general, but specifically the culture of the schools within the district where the school business official worked. The other topic that arose frequently was the necessity for the school business official to have credibility as he or she performed daily activities within the district. The particular relevance of these topics was that interviewees perceived, in many cases, that school business officials without a background in education lacked both attributes.

Understanding School Culture

Interviewees expressed the need for school business officials to have first-hand understanding of the culture of the school district in which they worked in order to contribute to the district's objectives. If a school business official had prior experience in another school district or in another function within the same school district, that experience probably, but not assuredly,

would accelerate his or her understanding of a particular school district's culture. If a school business official did not have prior experience in education, such as someone coming from the private sector, he or she needed to be an attentive listener and keen observer of activities within the school district. Otherwise, he or she would be on a steep learning curve in understanding day-to-day district operations. Thus, interviewees thought that some prior experience with school culture in general provided an asset to a school business official joining a school district, permitting him or her to contribute more quickly to the district's objectives.

Credibility

Interviewees indicated that, in most cases, school business officials, regardless of background, were credible people. However, their credibility was most often confined to financial topics in their school district. The term *bean counter* that was used as the vernacular and was a demeaning description of an employee who performs bookkeeping functions without sensitivity to the organization's activities was perhaps too harsh, but the interviewees cited instances in which this term might

be appropriate. Thus, gaining credibility was a definite challenge for the school business official without a background in education. Kouzes and Posner (1993, 1995) cited credibility as a dependency in a leader's ability to lead an organization.

Answering the Research Questions

The research questions in this dissertation with the researcher's findings follow:

1. What are the desired attributes (e.g., training, experience, or personal traits) that a school business administrator should have?

Sielke's (1995) statement proved both a valid starting point to organize this research and an accurate assessment of the skills that a school business official needed to perform effectively in that role within a school district. Undoubtedly, a school business official must be an exemplar of ethical, moral, and legal conduct both professionally and personally. Sielke advanced the description by listing levels of skills that a school business official needed to perform professionally. The first level of skills was technical skills, which included financial prowess with developing budgets and

managing large sums of money, knowledge of laws pertaining to education such as those relating to special education, the ability to control business processes that support education such as student transportation and food service, the capability to implement information technology to improve operational efficiency and instruction within the school district, and analytical abilities to diagnose operational problems and develop solutions to them. The second level of skills was human relations skills, which included the capacity to deal with superiors, peers, and subordinates in a positive, inclusive, and professional manner, the ability to function as a trusted source of information for other members of the school district's staff, and the ability to make credible and informative presentations at public meetings such as board of education meetings. The third level of skills was conceptual skills, which included the ability to participate in the development of school district policy, the ability to articulate the school district's vision of the future and the resources necessary to achieve it to small and large groups of constituents, and the capability to motivate others

toward achieving the vision as well as its intermediate objectives.

2. Why are the desired attributes indicated in question 1 important?

The school business official's role can be described concisely as stewardship. Conducting public education involves large numbers of people, most of whom are minors, in the State of Connecticut as well as in other states. The taxpayers in municipalities throughout the State of Connecticut entrust large amounts of money to school district administrators in order to conduct public education as required by state law. As a member of the school district's administrative team, accomplishing the taxpayers' purpose requires that a school business official have a broad and strong portfolio of management strengths and leadership skills.

3. Is the interaction between the school district's business administrator and the other administrators in the office essential to the smooth day-to-day operation of the school district?

As stated in the response to the previous question, taxpayers, through their Board of Education, employ a team of administrators to conduct public education in

their municipality. Individual school administrators have particular responsibilities within a school district's hierarchy, including overall responsibility with the superintendent, for instructional programs usually with an assistant superintendent, human resources with an assistant superintendent or director, special education and pupil services usually with a director, school building-level activities with principals and assistant principals, and business and other support functions with the school business official. Effective interaction among these administrators is essential to accomplish the taxpayers' directive to provide public education to the children in the community. As the administrator charged with responsibility for all of the district's financial affairs, the school business official must work with every other administrator. Therefore, the school business official must develop a productive working relationship with all other school administrators in the district for the district to function effectively. Because other administrators' feedback was important, this researcher decided to interview only other administrators in developing and carrying out this project.

4. Does the school business administrator's role within the district's organization have educational importance?

The importance of the school business administrator's role can be addressed best from the negative perspective--that is, if the school business administrator acted irresponsibly, would the effectiveness and reputations of the other administrators within the school district suffer measurably? While the answer seems obvious, history can provide numerous accounts, both inside and outside Connecticut, where irresponsible and ineffective school business officials' actions have not complied with legal requirements and ethical norms, thereby damaging the reputations of the school district and its administrators.

On another level, the school business official's responsibilities include most of the support functions that keep schools operating well. Some of these responsibilities, such as student transportation, availability of information technology, food service and building maintenance, are very visible to most of the district's stakeholders. Other responsibilities, such as payroll, accounting, and risk management, are less

visible to the stakeholders but no less important. Regardless of the visibility, one need only consider the repercussions when one or more of these responsibilities fails to happen as planned in order to determine the importance of the school official's role in the school district's hierarchy.

5. Does the presence or absence of the desired attributes in the school business administrator affect other district and school level administrators' capabilities to perform their duties? If so, in what ways?

As stated in the answer to the previous questions, the school business official's role interconnects with the roles of all other administrators within the school district's hierarchy from at least the financial perspective. Ensuring the accuracy of financial operations as well as its compliance with legal requirements requires significant management skill. The school business official's responsibility for coordinating visible support services, for example student transportation, also requires a high degree of management skill. If a school business official lacked the management skill required to control financial

operations and deliver support services efficiently, other administrators' roles would be affected negatively at a minimum because those administrators would have less time to perform the duties with which they are charged. A larger failure to control financial operations or deliver support services could truly disrupt the smooth functioning of any school district.

What is interesting about these findings is that controlling financial operations and delivering support services encompass only Sielke's (1995) technical and human relations skill sets. The findings of this research indicate that a school business official could be evaluated as effective without delving into Sielke's definition of conceptual level skills. Sielke posited that only school business officials with a background in education would function at the conceptual level. This researcher's analysis of the interviews confirms that other administrators perceive a credibility gap, at least initially, when the school business administrator lacks a background in education, thereby confirming Sielke's opinion. Because of the inability to provide skills at the conceptual level, school business administrators without a background in education cannot fully

participate in administering the taxpayers' charge to provide public education in a community. The answer to the next question provided additional insight into this analysis.

6. Could someone who did not have a background in education but wanted to become a school business administrator provide the desired attributes?

There was a range of responses in the interviews that provide opinions that answer this question. The following four responses show the range. One interviewee indicated that a school business official without a background in education could be a valued employee but never more than that. The second interviewee posited that it was easier for a person with a business background to learn education than the reverse; so, if a school business official without a background in education took the time to understand it by immersing himself or herself in education, and he or she then combined the understanding with his or her existing business skills, then that school business official could provide more added value than someone with a background in education but limited business experience. This interviewee concluded that besides the willingness to

take the time to understand education, open-mindedness and empathy were the key determinants for a school business official without a background in education. The third interviewee thought that a person with a background in business, a noneducator, "could do as good a job or better" than someone with a background in education. The fourth interviewee indicated that, "background only matter[ed] in terms of what their experiences were professionally. [The school business official's effectiveness was] more driven by personality, demeanor and presence, and communication skills than it [was] by background."

The opinions cited above portray the diversity of the interviewees' opinions. However, there was reasonable consistency of opinion when considering all of the interviewees' views. Three interviewees, coincidentally all from the same school district but not all of the interviewees from that district, indicated that the school business official's background did not make any difference in his or her ability to provide service to other administrators in the school district. More than half of the interviewees said that the school business official's background did make a difference in

his or her ability to provide service to other administrators in the school district. They cited the following abilities as very important for the school business official to have: the ability to understand the culture of schools and school districts, the ability to be sensitive to what results will occur in a classroom when making a financial decision, and the ability to speak the language of education. These interviewees thought that school business officials who came from outside education would have a steep learning curve in attempting to become assimilated into the school culture. They cited the desire to learn about education, being respectful to educators, and a willingness to observe and listen as prerequisites for assimilation into the school culture. Interestingly, these interviewees did not consider a school business official's prior experience in education as a surefire ingredient for success because the previous experiences may not have provided the necessary exposure to the gamut of business-related issues that a school business official faced.

Teachability of Education for Someone without Prior Work Experience in Education

Having heard multiple times about the objections to school business officials without a background in education as well as the interviewees' perceptions about their deficiencies, the researcher began asking the interviewees if it were possible to overcome the objections and deficiencies through a program in higher education. Most of the interviewees who offered an opinion agreed that someone without experience in education could accelerate his or her learning curve as it pertains to education in general and the culture of schools through graduate-level education. However, they did offer some qualifiers for such programs. Candidates for this type of program needed to be open to learning and have enthusiasm and compassion for education. The program needed to be taught by practitioners of education. The program needed to be comprehensive and include resident internships in school districts. A school business official who completed the program needed to have a supportive administrative team once he or she assumed the school business official position in a particular school district. Most importantly, candidates

for such programs needed to realize that they were embarking on an extensive culture shift from the private sector and that they would still be considered as an "outsider" initially.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The constituent administrators who were interviewed for this research indicated that the school business officials' previous work experience most often made a difference to them in the daily performance of school district operations. The interviewees generally thought that school business officials who had experience in education were more sensitive to educational and classroom-related issues, whether or not they had previous experience with school business because simply being exposed to the issues provided some credibility. A lack of experience in education created a credibility gap that most interviewees perceived as detrimental to the school business officials' effectiveness as an administrator. Lacking experience in education was often synonymous with being an "outsider" to the culture of education and was a recurring theme in the interviews.

Some school business officials who lack the experience in education did overcome the credibility gap through dedication to the position, a willingness to learn about education, and the sheer force of their personality.

The State of Connecticut's Department of Education's regulations for certifying school business administrators still permit individuals without experience or coursework in education to become certified as school business administrators in the State. Thus, to a large extent, the opinions of most individuals interviewed for this research and the State's regulations conflict. As described in Chapter II, three of the four states that surround Connecticut have more rigorous certification requirements. Changing the State of Connecticut's regulations for certifying school business administrators would not be easy because it would require approval by the State's legislature. However, there are some considerations that could justify embarking on this path.

State of Connecticut's Regulations for School Business Administrator Certification

As stated in Chapter II, the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) provided the almost

exclusive impetus for establishing certification requirements for school business officials in Connecticut. It is important to acknowledge that there was not broad support for these certification requirements from other potentially interested parties, particularly the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Connecticut Teachers' Retirement Board, and the superintendents of local boards of education. However, the law authorizing the certification requirements was passed in 1977. An anecdote to this story (W. J. Sudol, personal communication, March 21, 2003) is that school business administrators without prior experience in education, "the outsiders," cannot become members of the Connecticut Teachers' Retirement System, the State's pension system. They can only join the retirement plan in the municipality where they work.

The 1977 law created a broad set of requirements for certification as a school business administrator. Aimed at maintaining a large pool of candidates for school business administrator positions in Connecticut's school districts, the requirements for certification were fairly liberal. These requirements did not, and still do not, require candidates to have any experience or coursework

in education. Permitting such certification has created a cadre of school business administrators whom constituent administrators describe as "outsiders" who do not understand the culture and nuances of public education. Interestingly, while many of the constituent administrators who were interviewed expressed the opinion that public education was not the same as the free-market economics or the private sector, this more liberal approach to certification was more akin to private sector employment practices.

Unintended Consequences Create Credibility Gap

A citation from Kotter's (1990) work seems particularly a propos as an introductory comment for this section.

> Evidence from studies I have conducted strongly suggests that managerial careers in many corporations produce individuals who are remarkably narrow in focus and understanding, moderately risk averse, weak in communication skills, and relatively blind to the values of others. . . . They create individuals who are moderately competent at management (not highly competent), and not at all competent at leadership. (pp. 120-121)

Kotter further offered four reasons for the lack of leadership skills: (a) these careers often began in specialized departments within a private sector

organization, (b) promotions usually were to more responsible positions within the same department or function within the organizational hierarchy, (c) rapid promotions of talented individuals limited opportunities to learn anything at any depth, and (d) rewards for performance focused on short-term results.

Describing a school business official lacking a background in education and his or her ability to meet the requirements for school business officials in the 21st century, DiBella (1999) wrote,

> In truth, there are many sets of eyes looking over the shoulder of a school business administrator. A school business administrator coming to the position from the private business sector or a state agency may be totally unprepared to joust with the town treasurer, town accountant, a school committee candidate, or a town committee. Yet, he or she may have the strongest grasp of the latest acceptable accounting practices, policies and procedures. (p. 8)

Still, individuals with private sector backgrounds such as those described above by Kotter would be attractive candidates for positions as school business officials as prescribed by the State of Connecticut's certification requirements.

Interviews that formed this research consistently provided a logical connection back to Kotter's and

DiBella's opinions. The interviewees frequently expressed the opinion that school business officials without a background in education often lacked even a general knowledge of the field of education, of the language of education, of the norms and customs in education, particularly those within a specific school district, and of educational processes. Most constituent administrators who were interviewed thought that having such knowledge was highly desirable for school business administrators if they were to provide effective service to the constituent administrators.

> Schools, however, must please a host of constituents whose interests are sometimes mutually exclusive: students, parents, teachers, taxpayers, town officials, local businesses, and the community. Financial acumen and skills are simply not enough to succeed. In situations with multiple areas of accountability, successful school business administrators must have well-developed communications and interpersonal skills, traits sometimes considered inconsistent with the skills of "numbers" people. (DiBella, 1999, p. 8)

Thus, despite the Department of Education's intention to create and maintain a larger pool of candidates for school business official positions in local school districts by liberalizing the certification requirements for the positions, unintended consequences resulted. The constituent administrators whom this researcher

interviewed believed that not only did the lack of background in education permit school business officials to perform only narrowly defined management functions within a school district's hierarchy, but it also failed to provide school business officials with educational leadership qualities.

Most of the interviewees believed that the gap in credibility could be overcome with the passing of time if the school business official had a receptive attitude toward education and educators, was a willing and visible participant in the educational processes within the school district, was an eager and keen listener, was an attentive observer, and had a supportive administrative team within the school district where he or she worked. Additionally, most of the constituent administrators who were interviewed believed that the learning curve for a school business official without experience in education could be accelerated through continued professional development activities, before, during, and after the school business official's appointment to the position, but most importantly before the appointment. One of the frequently mentioned caveats to formal training programs

was that educational practitioners should conduct most of the courses.

Currently, no institution of higher learning in the State of Connecticut offers a program that is specifically intended to train candidates for the school business official position or sitting school business officials for their role within a school district. There are institutions that offer master of business administration, master of public administration, and master of science in education degrees that could meet the State's requirements for certification as a school business administrator. The fact that no specific program to train school business officials exists in Connecticut only reinforces the Department of Education's free-market approach to employment that has created the credibility gap.

Recommendations

As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, most of the interviewees advocated a training program for school business officials who lacked experience in education. This researcher concurs with these interviewees' position and recommends that completing a

professional development program in school business administration become a prerequisite for certification as a school business official in Connecticut. Implementing this requirement would accelerate the learning curve in understanding the field of education and the culture of schools for individuals who lack work experience in school business administration. The major caveat must be that current practitioners of education teach the technical courses within the overall program, such as accounting for municipal organizations, public sector finance, or school district operations. However, classes alone would not be sufficient to close the gap in experience. Resident internships in local school districts, having sufficient duration to experience school culture, administered by an experienced and certified school business administrator and monitored by a knowledgeable professor at a graduate school of education must also be required to complete a professional development program.

Professional Development Programs

In the spring of 2003, ASBO International and Purdue University (Wanger, 2003) surveyed over 2,300 nonvendor

members of ASBO to determine interest in two potential professional development programs for school business managers--a nationally accredited graduate certificate and a nationally accredited master's degree. Twenty-five percent of the respondents who were 65 years of age or younger indicated a strong interest in pursuing the certificate, and 21% of the respondents aged 65 or younger indicated a strong interest in pursuing the master's degree. "Certification appears to matter, especially to particular interest groups within the profession, namely, those who have worked in school business management fewer than 10 years, those aged 23-45, and those who do not have a graduate degree in education" (p. 8). How many of those respondents came from Connecticut was not published, but the survey documented the desire for more training in the field of school business administration.

Preparation Programs

Because no college or university in Connecticut currently offers a graduate level program in school business administration, considering what would be necessary becomes worthy of consideration. The National

Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) published seven standards for programs in educational leadership in 2002 (Jackson & Kelley, 2002). The following four of the seven standards are equally applicable to professional development programs for school business administrators.

Graduating students should have the skill to:

1. Manage the organization, operations, and resources (of a school district) in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment,

2. Act with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner,

3. Understand, respond to, and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context (of public education),

4. Participate in an internship aimed at synthesizing and applying knowledge and practice in an actual work setting (p. 195).

J. Murphy and Forsyth (1999) confirmed the importance of emphasizing leadership in professional development programs. When they have occurred, changes in licensure, certification, and accreditation have

focused on standards for the preparation and development of administrators and the nature of administrative work. Licensure means the initial qualification to seek work in an education profession. Certification means a second level of authorization as a practicing educational professional that normally requires competence and achievement. Licensure and certification are often used interchangeably. Accreditation means the approval of an educational unit, for example a high school, as measured against some standard of educational quality.

Focused Thinking in Wisconsin--An Example

The school business management licensure program (Statz & Price, 2003) at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater based its design on Wisconsin's Administrative Code for Educational Licensure and ASBO International's Professional Standards. Candidates progress through the program by following a sequence of steps leading to a license as a School Business Administrator. Recognizing that the school business official was a critical member of a school district's educational leadership team, this university's program focused on a school business

official's initial preparation and continuing development.

To begin the program, students perform a self-assessment of their knowledge and skill level compared with ASBO's standards for school business managers in order to establish a baseline for measuring individual progress. Program coordinators from the university review and evaluate each student's self-assessment work, which becomes part of the student's portfolio. Students then complete coursework toward a master's degree in school business management or toward the School Business Administrator license. While completing the coursework, students add materials to their portfolios that demonstrate attaining the desired knowledge and skills. Under the guidance of a mentor and the program coordinator, students complete an internship in which they apply their knowledge and skill in a school district setting. Again during the internship, the students collect documents for inclusion in their portfolios. Compiling the student portfolios provides a basis for evaluating a student's performance in the program and for planning ongoing professional development. The portfolio also provides documentation to the State for licensing,

support to the university for conferring the master's degree in school business management, and criteria to a school district that would consider the student as a candidate for a position on the district's leadership team.

Changed Thinking in Connecticut

Without a change in the certification requirements to become a school business official in Connecticut, and without the availability of a professional development program to meet these changed requirements, Connecticut will continue to have a cadre of school business officials who do not possess the educational leadership qualities that the constituent administrators in local school districts desire. Some school business officials will have the motivation, abilities, and fortitude to become educational leaders, but lacking the certification requirements and professional development programs will yield mostly managers not educational leaders.

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APPENDIX

CODE BOOK

DSRTATNML:Code Book--All Code Words 5/18/04 5:17:01 PM Page 1

Code Word	Parent	Text	Level	Added	Modified
BKGRND-ED	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	School business official described by interviewee had a background as an educator				
BKGRND-NON	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	School business official described by interviewee did not have a background in education -- came from private sector or from another governmental agency or from the military				
COMP-INSTR	SKILL-COMP		2	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's description of school business official's involvement with computers that were used for instruction.				
CRDBLTY	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's description of the school business official's perceived credibility.				
CULTURE	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	The interviewee described the existence of a different culture within the field of Education.				
DIFF-NO	PREFERENCE		2	11/16/03	11/16/03
	The interviewee perceived that the school business offficial should have a non-educator background.				
DIFF-YES	PREFERENCE		2	11/16/03	00/00/00
	The interviewee perceived that the school business official should have a background in education.				
ELEM-PRNC	INTVEE-FUN		2	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee was an elementary school principal				
INCUM-ED	None		1	11/18/03	00/00/00
	The current school business official in this district comes from education.				

Code Word	Parent	Text	Level	Added	Modified
INCUM-NON	None		1	11/18/03	00/00/00
	The current school business administrator in this district does not come from an education background -- private sector or military or other government.				
INCUMB-ED	None		1	11/21/03	00/00/00
	The present school business administrator in this school district had an education background.				
INCUMB-NON	None		1	11/21/03	00/00/00
	The present school business administrator in this school district did not have a background in education.				
INFO-RESRC	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's description of school business official as a trusted source of information.				
INT-OTHR	INTVEE-FUN		2	11/16/03	11/28/03
	Interviewee was another central office administrator, but not the superintendent of schools.				
INTERNSHP	TEACHABLE		4	11/16/03	00/00/00
	The interviewee thought that an internship in a school district would/could accelerate understanding of the culture of Education.				
INTVEE-FUN	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Function that the interviewee served within his or her respective school district, e.g. elementary principal, superintendent, director of human resources, ets.				
LONGEVITY	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's length of service To establish credibility for opinions offered				
MS-PRNC	INTVEE-FUN		2	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee was a middle school principal.				

Code Word	Parent	Text	Level	Added	Modified
OTHER-CO	INTVEE-FUN		2	11/16/03	11/28/03
	Interviewee was involved with the school system but was not a building rpincipals or centratl office administrator, e.g. Board of Education member.				
PREFERENCE	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	The interviewee's preferred background for a school business administrator, i.e. educator or non-educator.				
PROX-CLOSE	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Physical proximity that the school business official had to the interviewee as they worked together was close, i.e. same building				
PROX-ORG	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's description of a school business official who reported to the superintendent or someone else in the central office				
PROX-REMTE	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	School business official worked in a different location fromthe interviewee				
RESPECT	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's description of the degree of respect as a school administrator that the school business official commanded.				
SKILL-ANAL	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03
	Interviewee's description of school business official's analytical skill. Sielke's 'technical' level skill.				
SKILL-COMP	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03
	Interviewee's description of a school business official's skill with computers. Sielke's 'technical' level skill.				

Code Word	Parent	Text	Level	Added	Modified
SKILL-CTRL	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03

The interviewee's description of the school business official's ability to control support functions, i.e. student transportation, food service. Descriptions of the school business official's ability to deal with vendors were also included in this category. Sielke's 'human relations' skill.

SKILL-FIN	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03

Interviewee's assesstment of school business officials' financial skill. Sielke's 'technical' level skill.

SKILL-INTG	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03

Interviewee's description of school business official's human relations skill as evidenced by ability to integrate topics other than financial into meetings and conversations.

SKILL-LEGL	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03

Interviewee's description of a school business official's knowledge of education law. Sielke's 'human relations skill'. Sometimes this was more specific and pertained to special education laws.

SKILL-PRES	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03

Interviewee's description of school business officials' skills in making formal presentations. Sielke's 'human relations' skill.

SUPT	INTVEE-FUN		2	11/16/03	11/16/03

Interviewee was a superintendent of schools in the district

TEACHABLE	UNDRSTND		3	11/16/03	11/16/03

The interviewee thought that it was possible to learn the culture of schools through a program in higher education.

UNDRSTND	CULTURE		2	11/16/03	00/00/00

The interviewee described the necessity to understand the culture of Education to work effectively in this field.

DSRTATNML:Code Book--All Code Words 5/18/04 5:17:01 PM Page 5

Code Word	Parent	Text	Level	Added	Modified
VISIBILITY	None		1	11/16/03	00/00/00
	Interviewee's description of the school business official's presence in his or her school building. Could also include statements about the interviewee's perception of the school business official's comfort level in a school building.				
VISION	None		1	11/16/03	11/29/03
	Interviewee's description of the district's Vision statement. Sielke's 'conceptual' level skill				
VISON-ARTC	VISION		2	11/16/03	00/00/00
	The interviewee's description of the school business official's ability to articulate the district's Vision statement, i.e. the ability to tie resources to goals.				
VISON-MOTV	VISION		2	11/16/03	11/16/03
	The interviewee's description of the school business official's ability to motivate others to achieve the district's vision.				
VISON-PUB	VISION		2	11/16/03	00/00/00
	The interviewee described the existence of a published Vision statement within the district.				
CERTIF	None	Yes	1	11/17/03	11/18/03
	Information pertains to the certification process for school business administrators in Connecticut.				
HS-PRIN	INTVEE-FUN	Yes	2	11/17/03	11/18/03
	Interviewee was a high school principal.				
PRSNLTY	None	Yes	1	11/17/03	11/18/03
	The information pertains to the school business official's personality.				

DSRTATNML:Code Book--All Code Words 5/18/04 5:17:01 PM Page 6

Code Word	Parent	Text	Level	Added	Modified
TEAM	None	Yes	1	11/17/03	11/18/03

The information pertains to the "team" concept as described by ASBO.

ABSTRACT

OUTSIDERS AS SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS IN CONNECTICUT: USING CASE STUDIES TO DISCOVER WHETHER NONEDUCATORS CAN BECOME EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

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Fordham University, New York, 2004

Mentor: Sheldon Marcus, EdD

School business officials have increasingly larger responsibilities in the nation's school districts. In Connecticut, individuals without any completed Education courses or prior work experience in the field of Education can become certified school business officials. The intent of the Connecticut State Education Department's decision to permit such certification was to increase the pool of candidates for school business official positions. This research describes some unintended consequences of this decision by analyzing interviews with 18 peer administrators and 2 superintendents who worked with school business officials from both inside and outside of Education.

The researcher questioned interviewees regarding a progression of entry-level skills that a school business official would usually possess and then subsequently develop. Open-ended interview questions considered technical skills, human relations skills, and integration skills. The dialogues between the researcher and the interviewees were transcribed and subsequently analyzed using the Ethnograph™ software product. After analyzing all responses to a particular group of questions, the researcher segmented the responses further by creating subgroups that were based upon the interviewee's incumbent school business official's background, the interviewee's working proximity to the incumbent school business official, and the interviewee's assignment within his or her school district.

The analysis of the responses indicated that a school business official's background made a difference in the minds of the other administrators. A school business official who came from outside education faced the perception that he or she did not understand the culture of education or the operational processes within school districts. Interviewees thought that school

business officials who came from inside education had a distinct advantage because they understood the way activities and processes were supposed to work. Overcoming the perceived shortcomings was not impossible for school business officials from outside education. Listening ability, compassion for people, and dedication to the task of understanding education were necessary personal traits for an outsider. Interviewees expressed positive opinions about programs in higher education designed at accelerating the transition from outside education into school business official positions.

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