ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: STRESS IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY

STUDENT: Amber Targgart

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COLLEGE: Teachers College

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There is little information on the topic of stress experienced by public school superintendents. There are gaps in research regarding the stressors that increase the occupational stress experienced by public school superintendents and methods these individuals use to combat occupational stress. This study searched for clarification of these missing pieces by surveying public school superintendents in the state of Indiana. Participants in this study included 184 practicing public school superintendents. Survey methodology was employed utilizing the Administrative Stress Index (Gmelch, 1982) and additional open-ended responses, which were coded by frequency. One-way ANOVAs were conducted based on demographic variables, individual stressors, an overall stress score, and five stress factors identified as administrative constraints, administrative responsibilities, interpersonal relations, intrapersonal conflicts, and role expectations.

The top stressor reported by superintendents was “Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies.” Findings also indicated that school board relationships and task overload were stress contributors, as identified by the superintendents. These results
highlighted a need for public school superintendents to pursue professional development focused on school board relationships and collaborative leadership. Results of inferential analyses revealed a significant difference in how men and women superintendent respondents experienced stress within the category of intrapersonal conflicts. More specifically, women reported higher stress in some areas of decision-making (making decisions that impact others) and in not feeling fully qualified to handle the job. These findings suggested that female superintendents should seek ways to collaborate and support each other in a role dominated by males.