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# Chief School Business Officials: A Qualitative Investigation of Employment Longevity and the Career Plateau

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CHIEF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF  
EMPLOYMENT LONGEVITY AND THE CAREER PLATEAU

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

May 2012

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The pool of candidates for the chief school business official position is shrinking, as with other senior-level leadership positions in public school districts. In order to develop future professionals in school business leadership, it is important to learn from those who have experienced success. Since chief school business officials are prone to reaching a career plateau early in their careers, discerning the strategies used to mitigate the impact of career plateauing is important to employment longevity.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify attributes that contribute to employment longevity of chief school business officials in Pennsylvania, identify the category of professional standards published by the Association of School Business Officials International that is most important to employment longevity, and identify strategies used by chief school business officials to mitigate the effects of career plateauing which can impact employment longevity. For the purpose of this study, employment longevity was defined as ten or more years of service in the same school district. Nine chief school business officials with employment longevity were interviewed using a semi-structured process.

The findings indicate that the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official are a strong ethical frame of reference, effective relationships, job challenge, autonomy, and ongoing mentoring. The most important

relationships are with the superintendent and school board. Chief school business officials with employment longevity experience structural and personal career plateaus, but do not experience a job content plateau due to the continual challenges associated with the position. The Association of School Business Officials International professional standards related to leadership and ethics were most important to employment longevity.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM

The chief school business official holds a senior-level leadership position within a school system. This position has responsibility for the non-instructional operations of the school district such as budget and finance, human resources, purchasing, facilities, transportation and information management. The superintendent is the chief executive officer and focuses on the instructional aspects of the school organization. The chief school business official works very closely with the superintendent to ensure that the proper financial and operational framework is in place to support a successful learning organization. Due to the increased complexity of school operations, the role of the chief school business official has emerged from ‘number-cruncher’ to educational leader. Skinner (2005) asked the question: “Are school business officials education leaders?” He found that 82% of school business officials are part of their district’s leadership team, 59% are involved in creating the strategic plan, and 93% create the annual budget. This is an indication that school business officials have the potential to provide leadership to the educational program. In fact, every year there are more articles written in *School Business Affairs*, the professional journal of the Association of School Business Officials International, about school business officials as educational leaders. This designation represents a change from ten years ago (Musso, 2007a).

Employment longevity for senior administrators of any organization is critical to its success. It is especially important in public education given the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In Pennsylvania, school districts are required to develop six-year strategic plans based on state NCLB goals. Accordingly,

school districts develop their annual budgets based on the strategic plan which includes initiatives to increase student achievement. As such, the chief school business official must understand NCLB and related student achievement goals. As accountability for student achievement grows in public schools, so does accountability for efficient use of school resources in business operations. Further, the superintendent, as chief executive officer of the public school district, will work under the terms of a three, four or five year contract. The chief school business official as chief financial officer may or may not be employed under the terms of an employment contract and as a result, may have a longer tenure with a school district than the superintendent. Therefore the chief school business official often holds the institutional memory of the organization and employment longevity for this position becomes critical.

This study focused on employment longevity of the position of chief school business official in public school districts in Pennsylvania. Specifically the study identified attributes that contribute to employment longevity, identified the professional standards published by the Association of School Business Officials International that are most important to employment longevity, and identified strategies used by chief school business officials to mitigate the effects of career plateauing which can impact employment longevity.

### **Employment Longevity**

For the purposes of this study, employment longevity is defined as ten or more years of service in the same school district. Employment longevity results from job satisfaction and job satisfaction can be attributed to many different factors. Sebert (2006) studied factors that contribute to the employment longevity of superintendents in

Wisconsin public school districts. He concluded that the most important factor for employment longevity is the ability to build relationships. This is an intrinsic factor relative to the job of superintendent, but for other positions the factors may be extrinsic such as salary or working conditions (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1989). This study identified the intrinsic and extrinsic factors important to employment longevity of chief school business officials and attempted to answer the question ‘Why do they stay?’ as opposed to ‘Why do they leave?’

### **Association of School Business Officials International Professional Standards**

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) published professional standards for the chief school business official in 2001 (revised in 2005) that established the standards and competencies required for success in this position (ASBO, 2006a). According to Godshall (2007, p. 21), “ASBO’s professional standards for school business managers provide a detailed framework that may be used to understand the structure and complexities of the position, while clearly defining the role.” The ASBO professional standards are categorized by function as follows: The Educational Enterprise, Financial Resource Management, Human Resource Management, Facility Management, Property Acquisition and Management, Information Management, Ancillary Services and the Code of Ethics. Specific competencies are detailed within each category. Acquisition of these competencies should lead to a long, productive career as a chief school business official.

### **Career Plateau**

An employee reaches a career plateau when he/she has been in a position for a long period of time with no potential for further advancement. For teachers, Danielson

(2007) describes the reaction to a career plateau as “professional restlessness.” She suggests that teaching is a flat profession and that teachers with twenty years of experience may be doing essentially the same type of work as when they started teaching. Danielson credits professional restlessness for the development of teacher leaders, those who want to influence change either on their own initiative or in a more formal way within the structure of the organization. Principals or supervisors encourage teachers to leadership roles to mitigate the period of professional restlessness in order to keep the teacher motivated. Since chief school business officials are the most senior non-instructional administrators in the organization and many do not have the required certification to become superintendents, they reach a plateau early in their careers. They, like teachers, may be doing the same type of work after ten years of experience. Do chief school business officials experience professional restlessness? If so, it is important to understand how experienced chief school business officials who have reached their career plateau stay motivated to continue in their positions.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The pool of candidates for the chief school business official position is shrinking, as with other senior-level leadership positions in public school districts. The Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) reports that 35% of current school business officials plan to retire within the next eight years (McGill, personal communication, September 16, 2008). PASBO is concerned with developing future successful chief school business officials and has identified this as a goal in its strategic plan. This goal is listed under Workforce Development and specifically states: There will be an adequate number of prepared professionals to meet school business

staffing needs. (PASBO, 2010, para. 15). In order to achieve this goal it is important to learn from those who have experienced success.

There is a lack of formal preparatory programs for the position of chief school business official. One of the stated goals for developing the ASBO professional standards was for use in development of preparatory programs for chief school business officials. To this end, ASBO has two goals in its Strategic Plan relative to preparatory programs: (1) to ensure that a bachelor's degree in school business management is available to all members and (2) to develop a model of an online university program for school business officials (ASBO, 2006b). One university in Pennsylvania has developed an online master's degree program in school business leadership and used the ASBO standards to develop the curriculum for the program. This study determined which category of the standards is most important to employment longevity and therefore would be important to use as curriculum standards in the development of school business leadership preparatory programs.

Since chief school business officials are prone to reaching a career plateau early in their careers, discerning the strategies chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing is important to career longevity. This information can be used for professional development programs and career counseling for mid-career chief school business officials.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to identify attributes that contribute to employment longevity, identify the category professional standards published by the Association of School Business Officials International that is most important to employment longevity,

and identify strategies used by chief school business officials to mitigate the effects of career plateauing which can impact employment longevity.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania?
2. Which category of the ASBO Professional Standards is most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies or ethical competencies?
3. Do long-term chief school business officials experience career plateauing?
4. What strategies do chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it contributes valuable information to understanding the position of chief school business official. Information gleaned in this study identifies attributes for success in the position which leads to employment longevity and leadership stability in the school organization. Leadership stability is particularly important in public schools relative to school improvement efforts. Stover (2008) reports that research shows improving schools requires a long term plan and stable leadership. He encourages school boards to commit not only to stable leadership, but also to steadfast pursuit of school improvement efforts when leadership stability is not possible. A sustained effort lasting several years is necessary to effectively implement

reform efforts. This sustained effort requires leadership stability at all levels of the organization: superintendent, central office, principals and the chief school business official.

This study is significant because it identifies areas of educational focus for school business preparatory programs that will be useful for professional organizations in establishing continuing education programs. School resources for professional development are becoming scarce. Therefore, it is important to provide research-based, targeted professional development for school administrators. This study identifies the important ASBO professional standards relative to success in the chief school business official position and can therefore be used to develop targeted curriculum for preparatory and professional development programs.

This study provides a greater understanding of the impact of career plateauing on employment longevity for the position of chief school business official. Long-term employees who have reached a career plateau can either become a burden or an asset to the organization. Understanding the factors that motivate a plateaued employee is important to ensure that the employee remains an asset. Further, the concept of the career plateau is important for public education because other positions are susceptible to an early career plateau. Information from this study may promote further research relative to the positions of teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent or superintendent.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The framework for this study was motivation theory. Motivation theory is relevant to job satisfaction which is directly related to employment longevity. Further,

reaching a career plateau can have negative consequences for the employee and employer. Maintaining motivation when the career plateau is reached is important to employment longevity.

Frederick Herzberg distinguished between motivators and hygienes relative to job satisfaction in his two-factor theory of motivation (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993). Motivators are intrinsic factors such as achievement, recognition, responsibilities, advancement and the nature of the work itself. Hygienes are extrinsic factors such as policy and administration, supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships and working conditions. Herzberg determined that motivators are most important to job satisfaction (Webb & Norton, 2003). Therefore, motivators should contribute to employment longevity.

Stoner, Ference, Warren & Christensen (1980) present strategies that employees use to cope with a career plateau. The strategies employed can be either positive or negative. Positive responses include working hard, seeking additional job responsibilities, or requesting additional training. Negative coping strategies can include working only to the required job description, withdrawing from other employees, frustration, or leaving the job. Under the model presented by Stoner, Ference, Warren & Christensen (1980), plateaued employees can either become Deadwood (ineffective plateauees) or Solid Citizens (effective plateauees). Creating Solid Citizens, or effective plateauees, supports employment longevity.

The ASBO Professional Standards and Code of Ethics (ASBO, 2006a) were established to provide a framework for the successful work of the chief school business official. Specifically the standards have been developed to “assist training institutions,

accrediting agencies, certifying entities, and members of the school business profession to define and achieve educational excellence through the work of the school business official” (ASBO, 2006a, p. 3). The professional standards are organized as follows:

1. The Educational Enterprise
  - a. Organization and Administration
  - b. Policy and Intergovernmental Relations
  - c. Legal Issues
2. Financial Resource Management
  - a. Principles of School Finance
  - b. Budgeting and Financial Planning
  - c. Accounting, Auditing and Financial Reporting
  - d. Cash Management, Investments and Debt Management
  - e. Technology for School Finance Operations
3. Human Resource Management
  - a. Personnel and Benefits Administration
  - b. Professional Development
  - c. Labor Relations and Employment Agreements
  - d. Human Relations
4. Facility Management
  - a. Planning and Construction
  - b. Maintenance and Operations
5. Property Acquisition and Management
  - a. Purchasing

- b. Supply and Fixed Asset Management
- c. Real Estate Management
- 6. Information Management
  - a. Strategic Planning
  - b. Instructional Support and Program Evaluation
  - c. Instructional Program Evaluation
  - d. Communications
  - e. Management Information Systems
- 7. Ancillary Services
  - a. Risk Management
  - b. Transportation
  - c. Food Service

The ASBO Code of Ethics states that chief school business officials are “committed to conducting themselves within the highest standards of professional and personal ethics, to continuing ongoing professional growth and development, and to developing these beliefs in others with whom they work” (ASBO, 2006a, p.19). The Code of Ethics is categorized by ethical standards, ethical conduct and expectations of personal and professional integrity. Both the professional standards and code of ethics list several subcategories under the major categories listed here.

For the purpose of this study, the professional standards and code of ethics were condensed to three categories as described below and as depicted in Table 1.

1. Leadership Competencies: comprised of The Educational Enterprise

2. Technical Competencies: comprised of Financial Resource Management, Human Resource Management, Facility Management, Property Acquisition and Management, Information Management, and Ancillary Services.
3. Ethical Competencies: comprised of The Code of Ethics.

Table 1

*Categorical Depiction of ASBO Professional Standards and Code of Ethics*

<b>Leadership Competencies</b>	<b>Technical Competencies</b>	<b>Ethical Competencies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Educational Enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Resource Management</li> <li>• Human Resource Management</li> <li>• Facility Management</li> <li>• Property Acquisition and Management</li> <li>• Information Management</li> <li>• Ancillary Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Ethics</li> </ul>

The study identified which competencies are most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies or ethical competencies.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**CHIEF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIAL** – senior-level administrator who serves in the superintendent’s cabinet and has responsibility for financial and non-instructional operations of the school entity.

**EMPLOYMENT LONGEVITY** – the length of time a chief school business official works in the same school entity. For the purposes of this study, ten years of employment in the same school district was used to define employment longevity.

ASBO – Association of School Business Officials International. An international professional association for school business officials. ASBO provides programs and services, including professional development, to promote effective school management practices.

ASBO PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS – guidelines developed to benchmark the work and conduct of school business officials with the following goals:

1. Assist those currently working in the profession of school business management to perform their duties as expertly as possible.
2. Delineate the content of both the pre-service and professional development experiences of those entering or seeking growth in the profession.
3. Provide a framework for establishing accreditation standards for higher education institutions involved in training school business officials.
4. Present a model from which to build certification standards for the profession and aid local decision makers in seeking and securing the best person for the school business official position (ASBO, 2006a, p. 2).

ASBO CODE OF ETHICS – beliefs that guide the professional conduct and personal ethics of school business officials. The Code of Ethics outlines ethical standards, ethical conduct and expectations of personal and professional integrity required by school business officials (ASBO, 2006b).

PASBO – Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, an affiliate of the Association of School Business Officials International. PASBO has the same mission as ASBO, but provides programs and services in Pennsylvania. PASBO's core purpose as

stated in its strategic plan is to develop educational leaders in school operations (PASBO, 2010).

CAREER PLATEAU – the point in an employee’s career when the highest level in the organization is reached (Stoner, Ference, Warren & Christensen, 1980).

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to this qualitative study. First, this study was limited to chief school business officials in Pennsylvania so the results may not have application in other geographical areas where employment conditions and regulations may be different. Second, the limited number of interviews does not ensure applicability of the findings across the profession. Third, the study was limited to one type of position in public education so the findings cannot be generalized to other positions. However, this study provided the basis for further research on other positions. Fourth, the researcher is employed in the position being studied so bias may have been evident in conducting the research and analyzing the results. However the design of the study ensured replication to mitigate bias in future research.

### **Summary**

This research study was developed to identify attributes that are important to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania. The concepts of employment longevity and career plateau were discussed and an overview of the ASBO professional standards and code of ethics was provided. The purpose and significance of the study were outlined and four research questions were presented. In summary, this study identified attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania. It also identified the category of

competencies from the ASBO professional standards and code of ethics that are most important to chief school business official employment longevity. Further, it identified strategies that long-term chief school business officials used to mitigate career plateauing which also contributed to employment longevity. A review of the relevant literature and research pertinent to the topics being studied will be presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

Chief school business officials are prone to reaching a career plateau early in their careers. Therefore it is important to understand what motivates current chief school business officials to remain in their positions. Other scholars have looked at technical and leadership skills needed for success in this position (McClain, 2007; McGreevy, 2006; Sansouci, 2008) and the concept of career plateauing in other professions (Allen, Poteet & Russell, 1998; Shecket, 1995), but have not looked at the reasons chief school business officials remain motivated to stay in their positions. For these reasons, this study identified attributes that contribute to employment longevity as well as strategies used by chief school business officials to mitigate the effects of career plateauing which can impact employment longevity.

A review of related literature is presented relative to motivation theory related to job satisfaction, employment longevity, the concept of a career plateau, the position of the chief school business official and the skills required for this position.

#### **Motivation Theory**

Motivation theory related to work historically focused on extrinsic motivation. In the early 1900's, Frederick Taylor applied scientific methods to the world of work in order to increase productivity. Specifically, work methods were standardized and employees were able to produce more when the monetary rewards were greatest (Vroom, 1995). As work environments evolved and the field of industrial psychology developed, more attention was given to intrinsic motivation.

### **Motivation 3.0**

In contrast to Frederick Taylor and extrinsic motivation, Daniel Pink (2009) coined the term Motivation 3.0 in describing the importance of intrinsic motivation in today's workplace. Pink outlines three elements that are critical to motivating workers: autonomy, mastery and purpose. Autonomy means acting with choice in the four key areas of task, time, technique and team. Allowing employees freedom to get the work done in their preferred method, in their own time, working with a team of their preference leads to productive, motivated workers. Mastery is the desire to get better and better at something that matters. Engagement leads to mastery. Therefore, motivated employees are fully engaged in their work which they consider meaningful and this leads to mastery. Finally, employees must find purpose in their work. Purpose is contributing to a greater objective and employees must be clear about the role they play in achieving this goal. The presence of these three intrinsic factors leads to motivated, satisfied employees.

In developing Motivation 3.0, Pink built on the work of Ryan and Deci (2000) who describe the self-determination theory relative to intrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory posits that there are three human needs - competence, autonomy and relatedness - that when satisfied produce motivated workers. They further suggest that intrinsically motivated employees will seek challenges that will expand their opportunities to learn; however the work they are doing must be interesting and valuable. Both Pink (2009) and Ryan and Deci (2000) agree that intrinsic factors are more motivating for employees completing non-routine tasks compared to routine work. However, both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are relevant in motivation theory as it pertains to employment longevity of the chief school business official.

## **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation**

The motivation theory selected as relevant to employment longevity of the chief school business official is Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation. Frederick Herzberg developed the two-factor theory of motivation through interviews with over 200 accountants and engineers (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993). He asked them to describe a time when they felt especially good or bad about their jobs. Using critical incident technique he identified motivators and hygienes. Motivators are intrinsic factors relative to promoting job satisfaction such as achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility and advancement. Hygienes are extrinsic factors such as technical supervision, company policy and administration, working conditions, salary, and interpersonal supervision (Maidani, 1991). Motivators provided the most job satisfaction and hygienes provided the least job satisfaction. Herzberg also determined that the job satisfaction continuum did not range from satisfaction to dissatisfaction. Just because employees are not satisfied in their jobs does not mean they are dissatisfied. There actually exists, according to Herzberg, a continuum of satisfaction to no satisfaction, and dissatisfaction to no dissatisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993).

Herzberg's theory has been tied to the positive psychology movement (Sachau, 2007). Positive psychology focuses on the study of human strengths rather than human weaknesses. Sachau (2007) states the importance of positive psychology to all aspects of human resource management, not just the study of motivation and job satisfaction. Both positive psychologists and human resource professionals are concerned with improving performance. This close tie was the basis for an extensive analysis of Herzberg's motivation theory to demonstrate its relevance today.

Specifically, Sachau (2007) presented two misinterpretations related to the motivation-hygiene theory. The first misinterpretation is that employees cannot be motivated with hygiene factors. Herzberg distinguished between movement and motivation. Movement is used when employees attempt to fill hygiene needs and motivation is when employees attempt to fill motivator needs. For example, money can be used to move employees to do certain things, but cannot provide increased job satisfaction by itself. Therefore, employees can be extrinsically motivated with money, but not intrinsically motivated. The second misinterpretation is that not satisfied and not dissatisfied are neutral. If an employee has a job that has no motivators such as responsibility or achievement, the employee will probably be bored and not satisfied. This is an unpleasant feeling, not a neutral feeling. In the same way, a state of not dissatisfied due to a salary increase is a positive feeling. However, the positive state may be short-lived unless continued hygienes or increased motivators are introduced. Similarly, Sachau (2007) points out that it is better to motivate employees with motivators than hygienes, because hygiene-based motivation can be short lived. Therefore, employers should motivate employees through increased responsibility and recognition rather than salary and performance bonuses.

In summary, Sachau (2007) stated that the Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory framework supports the positive psychology movement because it helps to explain the feelings of satisfaction versus dissatisfaction, happiness versus unhappiness, intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation. Specifically, Herzberg's theory is relevant for long-term job satisfaction and therefore, employment longevity.

Bassett-Jones and Lloyd (2005) wanted to determine whether Herzberg's motivation theory had relevance in recent organizational dynamics. They used this theory as the basis for determining the motivation for employees to contribute ideas to their organization. Using a survey method that included 3,209 responses from 32 large organizations, they offered respondents choices to explain why they had submitted ideas. Bassett-Jones and Lloyd concluded that motivators that produce intrinsic satisfaction, such as wanting to contribute to the success of the organization, were more important to employees submitting ideas than hygienes, such as a financial reward (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Therefore, it appears that Herzberg's theory has value today in motivating employees.

In a research study specific to education, Smerek and Peterson (2007) surveyed 2,700 employees in the business department of a public university in order to specifically test Herzberg's motivation theory relative to job satisfaction. Their conclusion was that the most significant predictor of job satisfaction was the work itself. Other important variables were opportunity for advancement and responsibility. However there were also three hygienes that were predictors of job satisfaction: effective senior management, effective supervisor, and satisfaction with salary. So their conclusion is not as distinct as Herzberg's theory regarding motivators and hygienes, although the work itself did emerge as the greatest source of job satisfaction. In terms of suggestions to organizations from their research, Smerek and Peterson suggest that organizational leaders should work on improving the work itself and improving senior management and effective supervision (Smerek & Peterson, 2007).

McVay (2007) applied the Herzberg theory of motivation to job satisfaction of elementary principals. Thirty-five elementary school principals in California were interviewed to determine whether motivators or hygienes were more important to job satisfaction. The conclusion was that motivators are greater indicators of job satisfaction than hygienes. Further, hygienes were greater indicators of job dissatisfaction than motivators. Achievement and recognition are greater indicators of job satisfaction than the work itself, responsibility, potential for growth and advancement. The hygiene factors of company policy and administration, and working conditions are greater indicators of job dissatisfaction than supervision, interpersonal relations, salary, status and job security. Overall, this study supports Herzberg's motivation theory relative to the position of elementary principal (McVay, 2007).

### **Employment Longevity**

The chief school business official is the most senior administrator with responsibility for non-instructional programs of the school system. Employment longevity is important for leadership stability, and is especially important in educational organizations due to increased accountability requirements, both academically and financially. Evidencing the importance of leadership stability, Archer (2003) reported that several Foundations were withholding or withdrawing grants to schools with leadership turnover. He further stated that some foundations are releasing funds contingent upon a well-defined leadership succession plan.

Literature related to employment longevity in education has focused on teachers (Bobek, 2002; Matthews, 2003), principals (Papa, 2007; Partlow, 2007) and most often superintendents (Alsbury, 2003; Freese, 2003; Quinn, 2005; Sebert, 2006; Weininger &

Stout, 1989). Teacher employment longevity has been tied to resiliency. Bobek (2002) defines resiliency as the ability to adjust and increase one's competence in adverse situations. A teacher's resiliency is enhanced through being able to recognize adverse situations and to develop appropriate coping skills in order to resolve the issue. She states that resiliency will increase teacher retention, and resiliency is developed through building relationships, subject-level competence, career ownership, experiencing success, being recognized for success, and cultivating a sense of humor.

### **Mentoring and Employment Longevity**

Academic mentoring has also been used to increase employment longevity for teachers. Mentoring is the process of assigning an experienced staff member to integrate the new staff member into the culture of the organization and to assist the new employee with the technical aspects of the job. Mentoring is required as part of the teacher induction process in Pennsylvania, thereby recognizing its importance in career orientation for teachers (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2004). The new federal education plan will expand mentoring programs for teachers by creating incentives to create common planning time for mentors and new teachers (Eckerd, 2009). Hertting (2008) stressed the importance of mentoring for new principals due to reform initiatives, increased accountability and the myriad demands placed on principals. But mentoring programs also increase retention of academic staff (Coronado, 2009; Mathews, 2003). Coronado (2009) suggests that effective mentoring programs can increase the supply of teachers through a focus on retention rather than recruitment. Further, Mathews (2003) stresses the value of employment longevity by stating that retaining experienced academic staff is just as important as retaining the organizational leaders.

## **Employment Longevity of Principals**

Employment longevity for school principals is also important. The critical role of the principal in the school has been the focal point recently in research and writing on increased student achievement (Nettles & Herrington, 2007; Rammer, 2007; Rooney, 2008). Individual school leadership is recognized as critical for increasing student achievement under the No Child Left Behind legislation. A possible consequence of not meeting student achievement benchmarks is the removal of the school principal (Rammer, 2007). In fact, President Obama's education initiative will provide funding for the creation of state leadership academies in order to increase principal effectiveness and retention (Eckerd, 2009).

Papa (2007) conducted research to determine why principals change schools. He noted the important role of effective school leadership in education reform efforts. The principal turnover model used by Papa is described as the rational actor model; that is principals will leave when they feel a new school will provide greater job satisfaction, and the principal will be asked to leave if the school administration believes better outcomes will be achieved by someone new. Papa (2007) found that principal retention was especially difficult in schools with high enrollment of at-risk students and less qualified teachers. He further found however that higher salaries may be used to improve employment longevity of principals in such schools.

Partlow (2007) studied the frequency of elementary principal turnover in several Ohio schools as related to the following variables: superintendent turnover, student enrollment of the building, student attendance, student mobility, teacher to student ratio, teacher attendance, student achievement in reading and student achievement in math.

The only variables that were predictors of principal turnover were student achievement in reading and student achievement in math. Partlow suggests that higher student achievement may create a culture of shared vision and collaboration among all stakeholders in the school, thereby providing a positive work environment for the principal. Conversely, principals may be asked to leave when increased student achievement is not attained.

### **Employment Longevity of Superintendents**

Much of the research on employment longevity in education has focused on the position of superintendent of schools. However, the literature has tended to respond to the question of ‘Why do they leave?’ rather than ‘Why do they stay?’ (Pearson, as cited in Sebert, 2006). The literature review in this section will address both questions relative to the position of superintendent of schools.

Dissatisfaction theory has been researched and cited a factor influencing superintendent turnover and longevity (Alsbury, 2003; Sebert, 2006; Weninger & Stout, 1989). Dissatisfaction theory as applied to school governance rests on the fact that when citizens become sufficiently dissatisfied with certain policies they will elect new School Board members which results in superintendent turnover. Weninger & Stout (1989) studied a school district in Arizona relative to dissatisfaction theory. They traced the history of the school district and identified trigger points where dissatisfaction occurred and Board-Superintendent turnover followed. Their study confirmed the dissatisfaction theory through data regarding incumbent Board member turnover, voter discontent as evidenced by defeating bond and tax referenda, involuntary superintendent turnover, and policy changes that resulted. Four policy issues were determined to be relevant to

superintendent turnover: acceptance of federal aid, school organization, teaching of controversial subjects and school closures. The acceptance of federal aid was an issue because some community members believed this would result in loss of local control. However, other members felt the school district could use (and in fact deserved) the additional funding. Overcrowding of schools caused school organization to be an issue; the grade level configurations of school buildings became controversial. The issue surrounding teaching of controversial subjects evolved from a homosexual being invited to speak to a high school class, as well as perceived inappropriate books in the library. School closure was the most controversial issue and involved closing of a high school. Although this study was conducted from 1896 to 1986, the controversial issues that caused school board and superintendent turnover are still evident today, giving the dissatisfaction theory relevance to current school administrators.

Research conducted by Alsbury (2003) relative to the dissatisfaction theory studied political and apolitical board member turnover as an important indicator of dissatisfaction with the school system. Political board member turnover is defined as incumbent defeat due to controversial issues surrounding the school district. Apolitical board member turnover occurs when the incumbent decides not to seek another term, or resigns for personal reasons. Alsbury used a quantitative research method to determine the type of board member turnover (political or apolitical) and a qualitative method to study the reasons for board member and superintendent turnover within a school district. Relative to board member turnover, Alsbury determined that apolitical board member turnover does not result in the conflict caused by political board member turnover. He identified four variables to superintendent turnover as being relative to the dissatisfaction

theory: community values, citizen participation in elections, board values and district policy. Community values included student enrollment and assessed value declines, changes in socioeconomic status of community members, and changes in financial resource levels. Citizen participation in elections increased during the times when student enrollment, assessed value, socioeconomic status and financial resources decreased. More citizens voted and more candidates ran for school board. Further, as the school board changed, board values also changed. The gender and socioeconomic status of board members can change the nature of school board decisions and this was particularly evident when community antagonists joined the school board. Once superintendent turnover occurred, the new superintendent implemented curriculum, program and policy changes that addressed the concerns of the school board and the community.

In researching superintendent longevity in Wisconsin school districts, Sebert (2006) related the importance of dissatisfaction theory to Board-Superintendent relations. He employed a qualitative research methodology by interviewing six superintendents to identify the most important factors relative to superintendent employment longevity. The factors identified by Sebert's research were relationship-building abilities, leadership and management abilities and conflict resolution abilities. Building relationships with all levels of staff, the Board of Education, and the community were critical to longevity. The dissatisfaction theory was an important component of his research regarding School Board and community relations (Sebert, 2006).

Other factors influencing employment longevity of superintendents identified by Sebert (2006) were leadership and management abilities, and conflict resolution skills.

Of the six Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards for School Leaders, Sebert found that the following four were important to superintendent longevity:

Standard 2: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and professional growth (p. 113).

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (p. 119).

Standard 5: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner (p. 121).

Standard 6: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social economic, legal and cultural context (p. 123). (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996; Sebert, 2006)

Quinn (2005) conducted similar research on superintendent longevity in the state of Pennsylvania. In this quantitative study, he identified the following as predictors of superintendent longevity: School Board stability with lack of controversy on the Board, and prior experience as an administrator or superintendent. Interestingly, Quinn (2005) found that the following were not predictors of superintendent longevity: socioeconomic

level of the school district, student achievement levels, geographic region, salary, wealth of the school district, age and education level of the superintendent.

School Board relations are a common theme influencing superintendent longevity. This was the most significant factor regarding voluntary exit of superintendents in a research study conducted by Freese (2003). He interviewed twenty-two former superintendents to determine why the superintendent exited the profession voluntarily. While factors such as compatibility, efficacy, workload, stress, family/spousal factors, and life balance were important, the most influential were board relations, politics and new employment opportunities. Again, it is interesting to note that the superintendents with the longest longevity had experience as assistant superintendents (Freese, 2003; Quinn, 2005). In order to enhance superintendent longevity, Freese recommends that preparatory programs include training relative to school board relations, politics, conflict resolution, communication and time management.

The literature review on employment longevity focused on positions in education other than the target of this research, the chief school business official. Attributes influencing employment longevity were identified by several researchers relative to the positions of teacher, principal, and superintendent of schools. However, no relevant literature was discovered that addressed employment longevity for the position of chief school business official.

Long-term employees often experience a career plateau that must be successfully navigated in order to continue employment with the same organization. There are different types of career plateaus and employees have various reactions when

experiencing a career plateau. Therefore, a broader understanding of this concept by both employees and employers can increase employment longevity.

### **Career Plateau**

Most of the research related to the career plateau is based on the work of Stoner, Ference, Warren and Christensen (1980) and their exploratory study of the managerial career conducted in 1972 and 1973. Stoner et al. define career plateau as “the point in an organizational career where the individual is unlikely to experience additional hierarchical mobility” (p. 1). They state that a career plateau is a component of all managerial careers and stress that it is neither good nor bad but may affect job performance. Others have referred to the career plateau as a stalled career (Kormanik, 2008), career doldrums (Imel, 2000) and career gridlock (Leibowitz, Kaye & Farren, 1990).

There are two types of career plateaus according to Stoner, et al. (1980): organizational plateau and personal plateau. An organizational plateau results when the employee has the ability to perform at a higher level, but due to the structure of the organization no opportunities exist. A personal plateau is self induced, that is the employee does not have the desire for a higher level job.

A plateaued employee can be considered an effective plateauee or ineffective plateauee. An effective plateauee continues to contribute to the organization and performs at a satisfactory level. An ineffective plateauee performs at an unsatisfactory level. The model developed by Stoner, et al. (1980) calls effective plateauees Solid Citizens and ineffective plateauees Deadwood. Solid Citizens have a low likelihood of future promotion and demonstrate high job performance. Deadwoods are individuals

who have little chance of promotion and demonstrate low job performance. Table 2 presents the Model of Managerial Careers developed by Stoner, Ference, Warren and Christensen (1980).

Table 2

*A Model of Managerial Careers*

<b>Current Performance</b>	<b>Likelihood of Future Promotion</b>	
	Low	High
High	Solid Citizens (effective plateauees)	Stars
Low	Deadwood (ineffective plateauees)	Learners (comers)

*Note.* Adapted from Stoner, et al., 1980.

**Employee Responses to a Career Plateau**

Plateaued employees have options when experiencing a career plateau and may react in different ways. Stoner, et al. (1980) list the following responses to the career plateau:

1. Building a wall around themselves and their jobs. They do their jobs consistently and competently every day but block others out and also try to avoid criticism.
2. Building an empire. They play politics and try to build a power base with increased staff and perquisites. This is a defensive strategy for employees to try to hold onto their position despite a reduced lack of competence.
3. Building an outlet for the energies, enthusiasm and need for gratification not being provided by the job. They may become more involved in activities outside of the work place, such as community activities, social

groups, professional and trade associations. Non-work sources become challenging and rewarding.

4. Building an image which justifies the job. They rationalize the job as exciting and challenging, when in fact it may no longer be providing job satisfaction.
5. Striving to get off the plateau. They focus on improved performance and skill development, and become immersed in their work.
6. Carving out a niche. They adjust career aspirations to their present situation in order to justify their plateaued experience.
7. Making the present job grow and growing with it. They work hard to expand their job duties in their present job and are typically supported by the organization.
8. Seeking internal transfer. They seek other opportunities within the organization in order to provide variety or to take the initiative for increased education and development.
9. Searching for a more stimulating and rewarding environment elsewhere. They look for a different job within a new organization.
10. Embarking on a second career. They change careers resulting in a major change of life. (p. 93-100)

Responses to the career plateau are important to this study relative to employment longevity of the chief school business official because the chief school business official may use several of these responses to mitigate the effects of the career plateau.

## **Content Plateau**

Building upon the work of Stoner, Ference, Warren & Christensen (1980) regarding organizational and personal career plateaus, Bardwick (1986) introduced the concept of the job content plateau. Job content plateaus result from the developmental aspects of the job when an employee is no longer challenged by the work or job responsibilities. A content plateau occurs when there is nothing new to master in the job and the responsibilities feel repetitious; boredom sets in. Bardwick (1986) distinguishes between a content plateau and an organizational plateau as the end of the challenge versus the end of the climb. Challenge is the key issue with career plateauing according to Bardwick (1986). Employees need challenges in their work provided by change and growth that results from new issues, situations and problems. Additional challenge through learning is important in addressing a content plateau. Learning is an intrinsic reward and provides continued motivation through the plateau experience. Therefore, organizations need to emphasize the value of challenge over promotion. (Bardwick, 1986).

Content plateauing was the subject of a research study of sixteen veteran community college educators conducted by Shecket (1995). All of the educators in the study experienced job content plateauing due to the repetition of duties over their years of employment. Some coping strategies identified by Shecket (1995) included increased faculty involvement, committee work, professional growth and development, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Shecket noted that community college instructors reach a structural plateau early in their careers. This early plateau is similar to the career of a

chief school business official and therefore the results of Shecket's study should be instructive to longevity of the chief school business official.

Allen, Poteet & Russell (1998) related job attitudes of managers to the type of career plateau: hierarchical and content. They surveyed over 600 managers in state government and found that managers react more negatively to job content plateaus than hierarchical plateaus. These managers reported lower levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Managers who felt both hierarchical and content plateaued reported the lowest levels of commitment and satisfaction. These researchers suggest that employers be intentional about looking for content plateaued employees in order to provide them with support and education about the effects of content plateauing in an attempt to maintain job performance (Allen, Poteet & Russell (1998).

### **Categories of Plateaued Employees**

Extending the career plateau model, Leibowitz, Kaye & Farren (1990) report that there are four types of plateaued workers:

1. Productively plateaued. These employees have reached their potential, achieved their goals, are happy in their work and loyal to the organization.
2. Partially plateaued. These employees are experts in their field but have one or two specific projects that keep them motivated. They participate in professional association activities and have strong personal networks which make them feel less plateaued.
3. Pleasantly plateaued. These employees are content in their job and are not interested in advancement. This concept is similar to the personal plateau mentioned earlier.

4. Passively plateaued. These employees have typically been in the same job for more than five years and know the job well. They do not initiate change or take the initiative to learn something new.

Similarly, Karp (1989) and Tan and Salomone (1994) have categorized plateaued workers as follows:

1. The immune. These workers do not want or need a promotion; they value the work they are doing.
2. The adapters. They accept the reality of their situation and rely on their supervisors and the organization to reduce the value of promotion.
3. The deniers. These employees do not acknowledge being plateaued and continue to work hard.
4. The internalizers. They view the plateau as a personal issue which lowers their self-esteem and reduces job performance.

### **Turnover and the Career Plateau**

Turnover has been associated with the career plateau. Career plateau means no promotion opportunities which can reduce job satisfaction resulting in the employee deciding to leave the organization. Heilman, Holt and Rilovick (2008) found that career plateaus were negatively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment and positively associated with intentions to leave the organization. An effective mentoring program can mitigate the influence of the career plateau and therefore reduce turnover (Foster, Shastri & Withane, 2004; Lentz & Allen, 2009). Specific to public education, Marshall, Mitchell, Gross & Scott (1992) related career plateau to advancement and turnover of assistant principals. In a study of the assistant

principalship, they identified one category of assistant principal as The Plateaued Assistant Principal. This type would like to become a principal but has not been successful. Marshall et al. (1992) concluded that frustration and job dissatisfaction and will likely lead to the assistant principal leaving the organization.

### **Recommendations for Employers**

Several recommendations to employers have been identified to mitigate the effects of career plateauing on their employees (Hall, as cited in Appelbaum & Finestone, 1994; Slocum, Cron & Yows, 1987).

1. Policies facilitating lateral, cross functional moves.
2. Legitimize and promote slow career advancement.
3. Job redesign and training.
4. Skill-based (not position-based) career paths.
5. Create more “project-type” jobs.
6. Periodic rotation of technical specialists.
7. Temporary moves.
8. Downward moves.
9. Facilitating job switches.
10. Loaned employees.
11. Put pay in person, not position.
12. Give honest feedback.

Other strategies include promoting effective mentoring programs for employees (Foster, Shastri & Withane, 2004; Karp, 1989; Leibowitz, Kaye & Farren, 1990; Lentz & Allen, 2009); candid communications and education for employees to identify the implications

of the career plateau; alternate forms and reward systems through work redesign and job enrichment programs; second-career counseling and training; decreased role ambiguity through clearly defined job descriptions and evaluation systems that are aligned with performance expectations (McCleese & Eby, 2006), encouraging additional training and education (Tan & Salomone, 1994); and educating supervisors on the signs of job content plateauing in order to provide support to plateaued employees for training and development (Allen, Poteet, & Russell, 1998; Lapalme, Tremblay & Simard, 2009).

Bardwick (1986) provides advice to employees who are experiencing a career plateau. She counsels employees to be willing for change to happen, motivate themselves, create new ambitions, accept the risks, be disciplined, let go of past habits, be compassionate, and be patient. Sometimes the answer to a career plateau is to change organizations or change careers. However Bardwick (1986) believes that the key to overcoming a career plateau is continual learning to provide additional challenge in the job.

The studies conducted to date illustrate the career plateau is an inevitable part of the career and has the potential for positive or negative consequences. Further, research by Godshalk (1997) indicates that structural and content plateauing directly affect an employees' motivation in terms of job performance and intentions to remain with the organization. Chief school business officials are prone to reaching a career plateau early in their careers. How the chief school business official adjusts to the hierarchical or content career plateau can affect their employment longevity.

## **The Position of Chief School Business Official**

Leadership has been defined as “making happen what you believe in” (Baum, as cited in Phelps, 2008, p. 119). Following this definition, educational leadership is making happen what one believes in an instructional setting. Educational leadership is demonstrated daily by school administrators who believe passionately in student achievement. One such administrative position is the chief school business official.

The chief school business official position emerged in 1841 when the Cleveland, Ohio, city council established a position of acting manager of schools. This position had responsibilities in accordance with the enacted ordinance:

To keep a set of books, in which he shall open an account for each teacher in the employ of the city, and to make an accurate entry of all moneys paid out...to keep an accurate account to each school district, whether for teaching, or rent, or for other purposes...to provide fuel, take charge of the buildings and fixtures, and certify to the council the correctness of all accounts against the city for teaching, or for rents, fuel, repairs or fixtures on or about the school houses. (Hill, 1982, p. 3)

The position has evolved significantly since 1841. Today the chief school business official is responsible for working closely with the superintendent and School Board to ensure the proper financial and operational framework is in place so that quality education can occur. Hartman and Stefkovich (2004) describe school business officials as the chief fiscal officers for a school system, a position that can be very powerful and

influential as a member of the senior management team. Areas of leadership responsibility for the chief school business official include some or all of the following: budgeting and financial management, auditing, financial reporting, purchasing, pupil transportation, facilities, food service, human resources, insurance, safety, public relations and information management.

Just as accountability has grown more prevalent for student achievement under No Child Left Behind, so has accountability grown for efficient use of school resources in school business operations. Cattaro (2005) describes this accountability in terms of stewardship which entails being accountable for the entire organization through carrying out responsibilities efficiently and ethically. “Stewardship sets the tone for school business officials to approach their functions in a professional and ethical manner and be willing to be accountable for the well being of the larger organization” (Cattaro, 2005, p. 29). Due to increased accountability and stewardship, the chief school business official has become an integral part of the school district leadership team. In response to the question “What is a School Business Official?” John D. Musso provided the following response:

The School Business Official is someone who is able to balance a budget and maintain a fiscally sound school system while at the same time upholding the integrity of the instructional program. The School Business Official is a problem solver who finds ways to say “yes” instead of “no,” breaks down roadblocks instead of creating them, and understands that the business functions of the school

system are integral parts to meeting the needs and differences of every child every day. (2004, p. 6)

But is the chief school business official an educational leader? This was a topic of discussion during an international virtual conference held on April 24, 2007. The theme of the conference was Leading Schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Role of the School Business Manager (ASBO International Staff, 2007). The consensus of the participants was that school business officials are indeed educational leaders but two specific challenges emerged: gaining acceptance by the leadership team as a school leader, and general acceptance of school business officials as educators. John Musso, Executive Director of the Association of School Business Officials International, writes that it is crucial for all school business officials to be instructional leaders (2007b). Chief school business officials must be knowledgeable about the instructional program in order to effectively manage the financial and operational framework of the school entity.

Chief school business officials participate actively in the development of the school entity's strategic plan which sets forth the vision and goals of the organization. Once the strategic plan is in place, annual school budgets are developed to facilitate the accomplishment of strategic plan goals. The budget allocates the resources necessary to accomplish educational and organizational goals. As Jeff McCausland noted "vision without resources is a fairy tale" (as cited in Verardi, 2009, p. 30). Therefore, the chief school business official, as an educational leader, must ensure that goals are realistic and achievable based on available resources. The Association of School Business Officials International has identified necessary skills for chief school business officials to possess

in order to effectively participate at this level of leadership within the educational organization.

### **The Skills for the Position of Chief School Business Official**

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) developed a set of professional standards in 2001. The ASBO Professional Standards were developed by a committee of individuals within the profession beginning in 1999. The committee built on the work of Hill (1982) and McGuffey (1980) in order to develop the criteria for employing, training and evaluating school business officials (Deering & Stevenson, 2001). The committee recognized the changing landscape of education and the role of the school business official and understood the dynamic nature of professional standards. Indeed, the ASBO Professional Standards were updated in 2005 (ASBO, 2006a). The complete set of ASBO Professional Standards and Code of Ethics is provided for reference in Appendix A (p. 131).

For the purposes of this study, the ASBO Professional Standards will be categorized as Leadership Competencies, Technical Competencies and Ethical Competencies. Leadership competencies include the categories of organization and administration; public policy and intergovernmental relations; and legal issues. Leadership of the organization is central to the role of the chief school business official. Often the school organization is the largest employer, or “business” in the community and therefore the leadership is highly visible and accountable. Reitzug, West & Angel (2008) describe four concepts of instructional leadership evidenced by principals: relational, linear, organic and prophetic. Relational leadership recognizes the importance of working cooperatively and building relationships with staff and students. Linear

leadership relates to the organizational structure and the importance of formal systems in the achievement of goals. Organic leadership realizes that the individual school is part of a larger organization and emphasizes the importance of each part of the organization working cooperatively to increase student achievement. And prophetic leadership is community-minded which involves a sense of being responsible for the greater good, a type of moral leadership. The leadership competencies defined in the ASBO Professional Standards include components of all these types of leadership skills so they can be related to the job of chief school business official.

Technical competencies include job-specific skills required to complete the daily tasks of the chief school business official. Categories of technical competencies are financial resource management, human resource management, facility management, property acquisition and management, information management, and ancillary services such as risk management, transportation and food service. Technical competencies entail budget preparation and maintenance, accounting skills, managing the facilities, food service and transportation departments and being familiar with laws and regulations regarding those operations. This area also includes more specialized functions such as tax assessment and administration, auditing, debt management, data processing and management of personnel. As further detailed later in this section, most of the research on the position of chief school business official has centered on technical competencies required for both accomplishing the tasks of the position and for success in the position (McClain, 2007; McGreevy, 2006; Sansouci, 2008).

Ethical competencies are presented as the Code of Ethics which is part of the ASBO Professional Standards. These include ethical standards, ethical conduct and

expectations of personal and professional integrity. Hartman and Stefkovich (2004) describe the ASBO Code of Ethics as “Primarily focusing on job functions, this document describes an ethical context that encompasses the totality of the school business official’s work experience” (p. 17). These researchers present several ethical frameworks that guide decisions made by the chief school business official:

1. Ethic of Justice: decisions are based on law, regulations and policies within the framework of the justice system.
2. Ethic of Care: decisions focus on compassion, empathy and relationships.
3. Ethic of Power: decisions question laws, rules and the status quo.
4. Ethic of Community: decisions based on community standards and consider the influence of interest groups, taxpayers and other stakeholders.
5. Ethic of the Profession: decisions consider standards of the profession and professional judgment. (Hartman & Stefkovich, 2004)

Jacoby (2004) also considered the ethics of leadership relative to the school business profession. He stressed that character is of primary importance for an educational leader, in particular the model that is set for others inside and outside the organization. Jacoby posits that organizations and communities want to be associated with leaders who exhibit the following qualities:

1. Public Virtues of Leadership: above reproach, hospitable, of good reputation, sober, and dignified.
2. Personal Virtues of Leadership: temperate, prudent, not pugnacious, gentle, not contentious, not self-willed, free from the love of money, tested

through experience, not quick tempered, loving what is good, just and self-controlled.

3. Family Virtues of Leadership: faithful in marriage, good household manager, children under control with dignity. (Jacoby, 2004, p.17-18)

The chief school business official has to make ethical decisions every day in his/her work. Using an ethical frame of reference allows the chief school business official to set the tone for ethical behavior throughout the organization. Operating from an ethical base as professional practice will have an impact on employment longevity.

This study will determine which of the competencies described above, leadership, technical, or ethical, are most important to employment longevity of the chief school business official. McClain (2007) surveyed four thousand three hundred and fifty members of the Association of School Business Officials International. Eight hundred and one school business officials responded and he determined that seven technical and two leadership competencies were essential for success in the position. The technical competencies included administration, budget, financial resource management, compliance, human resource management, information management and support services. The leadership competencies determined to be essential were organizational leadership and inclusive leadership. These leadership skills relate, respectively, to Reitzug, West & Angel (2008) concepts of linear and relational leadership described earlier.

McGreevy (2006) studied the ASBO Professional Standards in relation to role theory, that is, the role of the chief school business official as executive, manager, and technician. The executive role included the ASBO standards of organization and

administration; public policy and intergovernmental relations; human relations; strategic planning; and instructional support program evaluation. The standards under the manager role were cash management; investments and debt management; personnel and benefits administration; professional development; planning and construction; supply and fixed asset management; and real estate management. As a technician the chief school business official had a role in legal issues; principles of school finance; budgeting and financial planning; accounting, auditing and financial reporting; technology for school finance operations; and labor relations and employment agreements. In this study, both superintendents and school business officials agreed that school business officials need to work efficiently in all three roles: executive, manager, and technician. Further, superintendents rated the school business official as “exemplary” in the areas of cash management, investments and debt management; personnel benefits administration; and accounting, auditing and financial reporting.

The ASBO Professional Standards were also examined by Sansouci (2008) in a study that surveyed superintendents to determine if the standards accurately reflected the skills needed for school business officials to effectively lead their districts. The five highest ranked areas of responsibility were accounting, auditing, and financial reporting; budgeting and financial planning; organization and administration; purchasing; and principles of school finance. Sansouci (2008) also found that superintendents are using the ASBO Professional Standards in some form to conduct performance evaluations of school business officials.

Much of the research relative to the ASBO Professional Standards relates to determining the skills necessary for success in the position (McClain, 2007; McGreevy,

2006; Sansouci, 2008). The research indicates that the standards are a viable indicator of the skills required for the position (McClain, 2007; Sansouci, 2008). However, none of the research addressed the ASBO Professional Standards relative to employment longevity. This study will determine which of the category of skills, leadership, technical or ethical, is most important to employment longevity of the chief school business official.

### **Summary**

A review of literature was presented relative to motivation theory, employment longevity, career plateau, the position of the chief school business official, and the skills necessary for success in the position. The concepts of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were discussed relative to worker productivity and satisfaction. Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation was selected as the motivation theory for this study for its potential application to employment longevity. This theory was defined based on Herzberg's original study. Herzberg's motivation theory has been studied extensively and research was presented with evidence of its continued relevance in job motivation, job performance, and job satisfaction.

The focus of this study was employment longevity. While there appears to be literature related to employment longevity for the positions of teacher, principal and superintendent, no literature was found specific to the position of chief school business official. Several of the findings attributed to superintendent longevity may be applicable to the position of chief school business official, specifically dissatisfaction theory and School Board relations.

An important aspect of employment longevity is the career plateau and organizational, personal, and content plateaus were defined in this chapter. The theoretical framework and research related to the career plateau were also presented. The literature described employee reactions to career plateaus and presented recommendations to employers and employees in dealing with the plateau experience. Mitigating the effects of a career plateau in order to remain motivated in the job may have an affect on increased employment longevity for the position of chief school business official.

The position chief school business official has evolved in responsibility and relevance over the years due to increased accountability in the areas of school finance and student achievement. The performance standards developed by ASBO were presented along with research that demonstrated that the standards are an effective indicator of the skills necessary for the chief school business official.

The procedures used for answering the following research questions will be presented in the next chapter:

1. What are the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania?
2. Which category of the ASBO Professional Standards is most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies or ethical competencies?
3. Do long-term chief school business officials experience career plateauing?

4. What strategies do chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing?

## CHAPTER THREE

### PROCEDURES

The pool of candidates for the chief school business official position in Pennsylvania is shrinking and there is a lack of formal preparatory programs to develop new candidates for this position. Further, chief school business officials are prone to reaching a career plateau early in their careers. Therefore, it was important to learn from those who have experienced success and to understand what motivated current chief school business officials to remain in their positions.

The purpose of this study, conducted in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, was to identify attributes that contribute to employment longevity, identify the category of professional standards published by the Association of School Business Officials International that is most important to employment longevity, and identify strategies used by chief school business officials to mitigate the effects of career plateauing which can impact employment longevity.

The information from this study can be used to develop curriculum standards for school business leadership preparatory programs, to develop continuing education programs for chief school business officials and for career counseling for mid-career chief school business officials. The information can also be used by superintendents and school boards in understanding the impact of career plateaus on chief school business officials.

#### **Research Methodology**

According to Berg, “the purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of systematic procedures” (2009, p.8). The purpose of qualitative

research is to explore a subject in depth in order to understand how experiences are interpreted and how people attach meaning to the experience being studied (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, a phenomenological approach was employed in this research study.

### **Phenomenological Approach**

Phenomenological research is a form of qualitative research that describes the meaning of a phenomenon for several individuals and how they experience the phenomenon in common (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Creswell states “the type of problem best suited for phenomenological research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals’ common or shared experiences of a phenomenon” (2007, p.60). The end result of a phenomenological study is a comprehensive description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). After reading this descriptive interpretation, the reader should be able to say “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (Polkinghorne, 1989 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 62). The research questions and interview questions were developed to investigate the phenomena of employment longevity and career plateauing.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania?
2. Which category of the ASBO Professional Standards is most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies or ethical competencies?
3. Do long-term chief school business officials experience career plateauing?

4. What strategies do chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing?

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study followed a research design similar to Sebert (2006) in researching employment longevity of superintendents in Wisconsin, and Shecket (1995) in investigating the career plateau phenomenon of community college professors. Sebert employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews to identify attributes important to superintendent longevity. He conducted in-depth interviews with study participants, who were superintendents with ten or more years of experience in their current position and resided within two hours of his home. Sebert used purposeful sampling and chose two superintendents from large districts (greater than 4,000 students), two from medium districts (1,000 to 4,000 students) and two from small districts (less than 1,000 students). He took extensive interview notes, audio-recorded and transcribed the interview, and allowed the participants to verify the transcript for accuracy. Using this research approach, Sebert identified leadership and management ability, and conflict resolution skills as important attributes related to superintendent longevity in Wisconsin school districts; in particular, developing a school culture conducive to student learning, collaborating with families and communities, acting in a fair and ethical manner, and understanding the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context of the school (Sebert, 2006).

Similarly, Shecket (1995) used a qualitative approach to investigate the career plateau phenomenon of community college professors. His population included professors with ten or more years experience at the same college. Shecket conducted

semi-structured interviews which allowed for probing by the investigator in order to provide more depth to the interview. Shecket also kept a field journal during the interviews to record his perceptions about the interview. He felt this was important because in qualitative studies the investigator becomes a research instrument and his perceptions and feelings could impact interpretation of the results. In Shecket's study, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for the participants to review for accuracy. Shecket identified strategies that community college professors used to cope with a career plateau: increased faculty involvement, committee work, professional development and interdisciplinary collaboration. This research design provided valuable information about the concept of career plateauing of community college professors (Shecket, 1995).

The research studies by Sebert (2006) and Shecket (1995) described above provided precedent procedures for this research design regarding employment longevity of chief school business officials in Pennsylvania. The precedent procedures included defining longevity as ten or more years experience in the same position; a qualitative, phenomenological approach using semi-structured interview questions; audio-recording and transcribing the interviews; using a field journal to record perceptions during data collection; and using member checking by allowing the participants to review the interview transcript for accuracy and allowing the participants to make modifications to the interview transcript to enhance the trustworthiness of the data.

### **Selection of Participants**

Nine Pennsylvania chief school business officials with ten or more years of service in their current school district were selected to participate in this study. The

population was identified through intermediate unit resources and the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) membership directory. The total population of chief school business officials with ten or more years of service in their current school districts was identified as 104. The participants were selected using a stratified sample based on student enrollment of the school district; three were selected from school districts with student enrollment under 2,000, three were selected from school districts with student enrollment between 2,001 and 5,000, and three were selected from school districts with student enrollment greater than 5,001. Since there were more than three chief school business officials in each enrollment category, the participants were selected via a random drawing within each enrollment category. A randomized approach was used in order to produce a representative sample within each enrollment category. Student enrollment categories were selected because it was anticipated that there might be some variation in responses based on size of school district. The researcher initially created an interview pool of fifteen participants, five from each enrollment category, that were selected randomly. Participants to be interviewed were selected and put in sequential order by enrollment category on a random basis.

Once participants are selected, the researcher contacted the participants via electronic mail inviting their participation in the study. When consent was received an interview date and time was scheduled. This electronic mail confirmation was followed by a mailing which contained a confirmation letter and informed consent form, along with the interview questions to be previewed by the participant. The researcher also included a copy of the ASBO Professional Standards and Code of Ethics (Appendix A, p.

131) to be previewed by the participant prior to the interview. All interviews were conducted via a face-to-face interview in each participant's school district.

The researcher began interviewing and continued through the list until data saturation was reached. This method was consistent with Lincoln and Guba who recommend not limiting data collection to a specific number of participants in a qualitative study, but continuing data collection until data saturation or redundancy is reached (as cited in Merriam, 2009). In this study, the researcher determined that data saturation was reached after nine interviews. At this point, the data collected were similar and common themes were emerging across participants as identified by notes in the field journal and confirmed by interview transcripts. The researcher determined that no new information would be forthcoming by continuing data collection.

### **Instrumentation**

This qualitative, phenomenological study utilized a semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured interview included a combination of structured and unstructured questions, allowed flexibility in the interview process, contained standard questions asked of all participants, and was guided by the researcher (Merriam, 2009; Willis, 2005).

The interview questions are presented in Appendix B (p. 143) and the interview guide with follow-up questions is presented in Appendix C (p. 146). Interview questions were developed using research from similar doctoral dissertations (Sebert, 2006; Sheket, 1995), the Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) Professional Standards and Code of Ethics and relevant research regarding employment longevity and career plateauing.

A total of twenty interview questions were used. Table 3 illustrates how the interview questions related to the research questions. This matrix was developed to ensure that the interview questions were relevant to the research questions and was used as a guide when analyzing data from the interviews. The matrix of interview questions to research questions is a tool that was used during the coding process in order to manage the data and structure the themes that emerged.

Table 3

*Research Questions – Interview Questions Matrix*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What are the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania?	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21
2. Which category of the ASBO Professional Standards is most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies or ethical competencies?	1, 2, 4, 19, 20, 21
3. Do long-term chief school business officials experience career plateauing?	3, 5, 7, 9, 20, 21
4. What strategies do chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing?	3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 20, 21

The interview questions were field tested through interviews with three chief school business officials who were not participants in the study. One participant had employment longevity (ten or more years of experience in their school district) and only worked in one school district; one had employment longevity but was with another school district or school districts previously; and one had changed school districts often. The participants in the pilot study were selected by the researcher using purposeful

sampling based mainly on convenience. While there are limitations on using convenience sampling in a research study (Merriam, 2009), it was important to use participants in the pilot study who were known to the researcher in order to make sure limitations in the interview questions were identified. Once the data from the pilot interviews were compiled and categorized, the researcher reviewed this information with a retired chief school business official who had over ten years experience in his school district prior to retirement. Two interview questions were revised, two questions were added (numbers 3 and 12) and one sub-question was added to the interview guide based on responses during the pilot interviews and the review with the retired chief school business official.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data for this research study came from two sources. The primary source was the interview data and the secondary source was a field journal maintained by the researcher during data collection.

Data was collected via face-to-face interviews with participants in the study. This was a semi-structured interview which allowed for variation and informality in the process. However, the researcher used the interview guide (see Appendix C, p. 146) in order to maintain consistency in the interview process across participants. To ensure the integrity of the data collected, the interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed to written form by a third party. The written transcript was forwarded to the appropriate participant to be checked for accuracy. The participant was allowed to modify the transcript for clarification purposes; however no changes were made by any of the

participants. Member checking, or respondent validation, is a common strategy to establish internal validity in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

The questions for most research projects come from a personal interest in the topic (Merriam, 2009). The researcher is a long-term chief school business official and has experienced employment longevity and career plateauing, and therefore had a personal interest in the research topics being addressed in this study. While personal interest has generated topics for this research, Merriam (2009) warns the researcher to be aware of how his or her viewpoints or experiences may impact the interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. Epoche is a process that a researcher can use to “remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation” (Merriam, 2009, p. 199). This requires the researcher to focus on the descriptions provided by the participants and not on his or her own experiences. Specifically, the researcher must “set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 59-60).

In order to mitigate potential bias, the researcher used a field journal throughout the interview process. Immediately after each interview, the researcher prepared journal entries relative to the responses from interview questions. The journal entries included personal observations and reflections about the respondent, and a preliminary list of themes that emerged from the interview. Reflection during data collection is an important part of the qualitative research process (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The reflections and notes in the field journal were used to support the interview data during

data analysis. Using this method, data collection and analysis were occurring at the same time throughout this study (Merriam, 2009).

### **Data Analysis**

Written transcripts of the audio-recorded interviews were read carefully, and coded by the researcher. Data analysis was conducted immediately after the first interview, and continued on an ongoing basis after each subsequent interview. In qualitative research, data analysis begins with the initial interaction with the participants and continues throughout the entire study (Gay, Mills & Airasian (2009). Data were analyzed after each interview and this preliminary analysis required minor adjustments in the interview guide in order to focus the data on the research questions.

Using the field journal, interview guide and interview transcript, the data were categorized using a coding technique described by Merriam (2009). “Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 173). Initially, the data were organized according to the interview questions. Data analysis began with open coding by assigning descriptions to units of data. These units were then grouped into common categories through a process called axial coding, or analytical coding.

Analytical coding requires interpretation and reflection on the part of the researcher which is an integral part of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). An interpretive analysis requires the researcher to give meaning to the data as a result of reflection on the data and themes that emerge (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002).

The field journal, combined with data from the interview transcripts, formed the basis of the interpretive analysis during data collection and data analysis.

The researcher established categories by reading through each interview transcript and making a list of common codes. The researcher then reread the interview transcripts to track the commonality of each code identified. The data were then reduced into categories, or themes, based on the frequency of the code and the research question it supported. This technique identified five emergent themes common to all participants throughout the data collection and analysis process. As per data analysis criteria identified by Merriam (2009), the categories were responsive to the purpose of the research, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data, and conceptually congruent.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the results of this study, the researcher asked another person, independent of the study, to review the first two transcripts and develop a list of common codes. These codes were compared to the list developed by the researcher and many of the common themes matched those identified by the researcher. This process added rigor to the analytical approach used in this qualitative study.

In the next chapter, data from the interviews will be presented by individual participant in order to provide the reader with a rich description of their experiences relative to employment longevity and career plateauing. Illustrative comments will support the interview data and emergent themes will be presented.

### **Summary**

A semi-structured interview process was used in this qualitative study with chief school business officials in Pennsylvania who have ten or more years of experience in the same school district. Interview questions were developed using research from similar dissertations and other relevant professional publications. The population was

determined through intermediate unit resources and the PASBO membership directory. Nine chief school business officials were selected for interviews using a stratified sample based on the student enrollment of the school district. The interviews were held at school district of the interviewee via a face-to-face interview. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed to written form by a third party. Once transcribed, the interviewee received a copy to be checked for accuracy and modified as necessary. Analysis of the narrative data enabled the researcher to identify the common attributes contributing to employment longevity of the chief school business official, the category of competencies within the ASBO standards that are most important to employment longevity, and the strategies used by chief school business official to mitigate the impact of career plateauing.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to identify attributes that contribute to employment longevity of chief school business officials, identify the category of professional standards published by the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) that is most important to employment longevity, and identify strategies used by chief school business officials to mitigate the effects of career plateauing which can impact employment longevity. A qualitative research method was employed consisting of nine interviews with chief school business officials in Pennsylvania who have achieved employment longevity, defined as ten or more years of service in their current school district. Three chief school business officials were interviewed from small school districts with student enrollment under 2,000, three from medium-sized school districts with student enrollment between 2,001 and 5,000, and three from large school districts with student enrollment greater than 5,001.

Information gleaned from the interviews will be presented in this chapter using fictitious names and non-specific information about the school district in order to protect confidentiality. Emergent themes will be then be presented and discussed relative to the following research questions:

1. What are the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania?

2. Which category of the ASBO Professional Standards is most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies or ethical competencies?
3. Do long-term chief school business officials experience career plateauing?
4. What strategies do chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing?

### **Participants**

Nine participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview process. The interview questions are presented in Appendix B (p. 143) and the interview guide listing the sub-questions can be found in Appendix C (p. 146). Detailed information from each participant interview is provided in this chapter in order to provide a rich description of each individual's experience relative to employment longevity and career plateauing. This provides a detailed structural description of how the participants experienced the phenomena of employment longevity and career plateauing. At the end of this chapter, emergent themes are presented based on the data collected during the nine participant interviews.

### **Synopsis of Participants**

The participants in this study included nine chief school business officials with employment longevity. Two were female, seven were male and their ages ranged from 44 to 60. Three participants had bachelor's degrees and seven had master's degrees. Their years of experience as a chief school business official at their current school district ranged from ten to 26. They were all employed in the state of Pennsylvania and there was no commonality as to their geographic region of the state. Table 4 provides a

summary of the demographic information for participants. The participants are presented in the table in chronological order of interviews as presented in this chapter.

Table 4

*Demographic Data for Participants*

Name	Age	Highest Education Level	Years as Chief School Business Official at Current School District	Size of School District	Student Enrollment
Edward	60	Bachelors	18	Large	5,895
Caroline	57	Masters	13	Small	1,457
Martin	55	Bachelors	12	Small	1,108
Jack	54	Masters	26	Medium	3,986
Michael	44	Masters	10	Large	5,825
Melissa	45	Masters	16	Medium	2,219
Glenn	49	Bachelors	11	Small	1,646
Gino	56	Masters	21	Large	5,679
Daniel	44	Masters	13	Medium	2,727

**Edward**

Edward has been with his school district of 5,895 students for a total of 32 years. He has been the chief school business official for 18 years. He started his career there as a supervisor of support services in the business office and prior to school district employment, he was a manager in the retail industry. Edward has a bachelor's degree in psychology and accounting and started his career in retail right out of college.

Edward is a member of the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) and the Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO), but not active in either organization. He does not serve on any committees and has not served on the Board of Directors. For several years he was treasurer of his

PASBO regional chapter. Edward is very active in his church but no other community organizations.

According to Edward, the most important responsibility of the chief school business official is working with the budget, “planning it, monitoring it, doing the investments.” Edward described with excitement work that he has done outside his normal area of responsibility that included setting up an educational foundation that raises money to provide scholarships for students in his district. The foundation awards approximately \$40,000 in scholarships each year and Edward serves as the foundation treasurer.

Edward spoke strongly of the importance of ethics in his job. He describes ethics as “being totally honest, open, transparent, not doing anything that would bring a negative impact onto the school district.” Acting in an ethical manner is a key component in the effectiveness of any chief school business official according to Edward. “If someone has the thought that they can’t really trust what the business manager is saying or doing, that starts to erode. It’s kind of like a piece of sand in a bearing; over time it’s just going to wear out that bearing and there’s not going to be any trust there, there’s not going to be any credibility.”

The things Edward likes best about his job are the variety and the relationships with people he works with both inside and outside the school district. The things that cause job frustration for Edward are state and federal regulations, and insufficient funding to do the important work that needs to be done.

Edward still feels challenged in his job describing it this way: “situations are always different; the economy is changing all the time, the regulations change all the

time, people change all the time. It's a very fluid organization and fluid operation.”

Edward does not expect any further hierarchical advancement in his career and he plans to retire in five years. He has already worked with the superintendent and School Board to develop a transition plan because it is important to him to leave the organization with an effective structure to maintain the effectiveness of the business function. Due to his pending retirement, Edward does not plan any more formal education.

In discussing his employment longevity, Edward describes the importance of having a variety of tasks, and the freedom to establish work procedures and make decisions. He feels the ASBO Professional Standards related to leadership are the most important to his employment longevity. Edward had several mentors that were important in his career development. He described at least three mentors, as well as the collaboration he receives from other chief school business officials in his geographical area. Edward has had very supportive relationships with both superintendents and School Boards over his 18 year career as a chief school business official. When asked what, if anything, would make him consider leaving the organization, Edward responded that a bad relationship with either the superintendent or School Board would be a consideration.

Edward has had a successful career at his school district and sums it up this way: “It's been a fun and a quick 32 years!”

### **Caroline**

Caroline has a bachelor's degree in business management and a master's degree in school business leadership. Prior to entering the field of school business she worked for seven years in the private sector in purchasing and financial services. Caroline's experience prior to becoming chief school business official at her current district includes

business manager at a vocational technical school for seven years, and business office manager and business administrator at another school district for nine years. Caroline has been the chief school business official at her current school district for 13 years. Her school district's student enrollment is 1,457.

Caroline is very active in professional associations both at the state and national level. She has served on several committees at both levels and was an officer in the state association. She is active in the community with the Chamber of Commerce at the superintendent's request.

Caroline feels that the role of the chief school business official is to make sure that the school district can operate financially so that other staff can concentrate on serving the students. She describes her role as making sure

that the infrastructure around the student will be maintained so that they can serve the student, meaning that the food is being provided, the building is available and healthy and safe, the insurances are sufficient to handle any risk that might come up, that people who are serving the students are getting paid appropriately, and that the community has access to the programs and has communications with what's going on in the schools, that the taxpayers are not overburdened in order for those people to serve the kids. And trying to balance all of that so that the rest of the school function can be just focusing on the students and knowing they have the supplies and resources necessary to educate the students properly.

Caroline is proud of an innovative project she worked on with the superintendent developing a ten year facilities upgrade plan. She put the necessary financial plan in place to accomplish the upgrades to the schools and also worked closely with the superintendent to communicate the plan to school district stakeholders. This project gave her a great amount of job satisfaction because she used her expertise to design and implement a program that significantly benefitted the students and her community.

Caroline spoke strongly about the importance of ethics in her position. She described the need to treat everyone equitably in her position in order to build trust and confidence in her leadership. Of the three categories of competencies within the ASBO Professional Standards she chose ethical standards as most important to her employment longevity.

For Caroline job satisfaction comes from having autonomy over her work and her department. “I am trusted by my superintendent and my school board. They know I will report to them when I need to.” Having the trust of her superintendent and school board provides great job satisfaction. She also values the flexibility and variety of responsibilities her job provides. Job dissatisfaction comes from “closed-minded individuals, either within the organization or outside of the organization.” Caroline speaks of this in terms of people trying to discredit the organization and the good work that people are doing when they do not have all the facts.

Despite the negatives, Caroline highly values her work and feels challenged every day by her responsibilities. While Caroline still feels challenged by her work, she stated that “there is that down side of the career channel where I’m not really bored with it, but I’m exhausted. It is that same thing? I’m gearing up for, oh my God, we have to get into

budget development again, and the budget just got done.” When asked how she gets through those times she said that she tries to look at it from a different perspective each time, to make it fresh or new. She may change the procedures, stakeholders involved in the process, or the budget presentation to the staff and community.

Caroline has been promoted a few times in her career but her interest in promotion is that it brings credibility to her and the decisions she has to make; the material aspects of a promotion or the title are not important. But she feels it is important for her to have credibility in order to be effective in her job. Caroline does not expect further hierarchical advancement in her career. However, in five years she believes her district may be consolidated and she expects her job to be within a different structure with perhaps more responsibility. Caroline did not mention retirement although she would be eligible in five years.

When asked to list factors that contribute to her employment longevity Caroline described her dedication to the school district, recognition from school board for the work she does, a supportive team of individuals that work with her, and a supportive superintendent. Caroline had a very important mentor in her career, someone she gives credit for setting her “ethical and business acumen compass.” At this point in her career, she enjoys being a mentor for others, especially younger chief school business officials within her region.

Caroline spoke strongly of the importance of professional associations in her career development as a chief school business official, in particular the offering of training on new initiatives and regulations in school business. However, she felt that state associations could offer some additional training for chief school business officials

with longevity and she mentioned topics such as leadership, negotiations, school law, school board/community relations, and communication. Caroline does not plan more formal education unless a relevant course would interest her.

At her school district, relationships with superintendents and school boards have been mainly supportive. When problems arose, Caroline dealt with the individuals, both superintendents and school board members, directly and promptly to discuss the concerns. Caroline feels she has stayed at her school district about the right amount of time. She feels she may be at the tail end of what she can do for her school district, but has some projects that she would like to see finalized. In the past, she thought about leaving and was recruited twice for interviews but was not selected. Although she went on the interviews, Caroline was not real serious about the interviews or leaving her current school district. However, Caroline would leave if there was significant confrontation at the administration or school board levels. “There’s good confrontation and there’s bad confrontation. Confrontation that changes our direction I don’t mind. Confrontation that diminishes or deteriorates what we’ve built would be where it starts to divide the community and the staff and really becomes an issue.”

### **Martin**

Martin is very much a technician-type of chief school business official. He works for a small school district with limited staff in the business office so he is familiar with all school business tasks. He loves working with numbers and creating spreadsheets in order to have accurate information at his fingertips to present to his superintendent and school board. He has also spent time developing spreadsheets for those who work in his office so his access to information is more efficient across all business office functions. He

describes his job as being responsible for “anything with a dollar sign” with his most important responsibility being the annual budget.

Martin has been the chief school business official at his school district for twelve years. Prior to becoming a chief school business official, he worked as an accountant for another school district and prior to that as a business manager at a vocational technical school. Martin has a bachelor’s degree in business administration and a total of 33 years of experience in school business management.

Martin is not very active in professional or community service organizations. He is a member of PASBO but does not serve on any committees. He was active in the community with youth sports when his children were younger but has limited involvement now.

Martin describes the importance of ethics in terms of honesty, integrity and truthfulness in all his dealings, both his professional and personal lives. He values honesty in his work with the superintendent, school board and community stating “we don’t want to hide anything; we don’t want to give anybody false information.”

Job satisfaction comes from the interaction with people Martin works with. At his school district, the staff is very close-knit and they work well together. He values the variety of tasks on a daily basis and the fact that every day is different. While relationships cause job satisfaction, Martin also described being frustrated by some relationships. He finds it frustrating when others do not accomplish what they are supposed to do which causes him problems in his work. “Sometimes there are things within the district where your job depends on somebody else doing something first. And if that person is not doing their job, then it gets me frustrated that I can’t do my job

properly.” Martin feels challenged in his work due to the changing requirements, variety of tasks to accomplish every day, and the autonomy that comes from working in a small school district. If he could, Martin would change the following three things about his job: state forms and reporting, federal reporting, and burdensome transportation requirements. Martin plans to remain working as a chief school business official until he retires and he does not expect any further hierarchical advancement in his career.

Martin feels that not being recognized means he is doing a good job.

If things go smoothly, everything balances, I get good audits when the auditors come in and do the audit reports, and there are no findings or a minor finding for whatever it might be, that’s my satisfaction. That I’m doing what I’m supposed to be doing and/or if I’m doing my budget and presenting my budget to the school board, and there aren’t that many questions, that means I’m doing a good job of providing enough information to the school board to make an informed decision. That’s sort of my satisfaction.

Martin stated that the following factors contribute to his employment longevity at his school district: the variety of tasks he is challenged with every day; his enjoyment of what he is doing and coming to work each day; the technical aspects of the job, especially accounting and creating spreadsheets; and autonomy in how he gets his work done.

Martin had two mentors who were important in his career. One was an auditor who taught him the technical aspects of the job in the areas of budget and financial reporting. The other was a former business manager who mentored him in terms of the role of the chief school business official and working with the school board. Martin

describes these two mentors as having a significant impact on his career as a chief school business official.

PASBO is also important to Martin's employment longevity. Not only is PASBO an important resource to obtain timely school business information, but he also described the importance of the networking opportunities PASBO provides. Martin enjoys going to workshops and other professional meetings in order to interact with other business managers. Martin will continue his involvement with professional development programs through PASBO but does not plan more formal education or professional certifications.

Martin describes relationships with his superintendent and school board as very supportive. He attributes this to open communication and honesty. Martin values transparency with the information he provides to the superintendent and school board. In fact, Martin left a previous position because his supervisor did not have the same philosophy about transparent financial information. This caused a strained relationship and Martin left the position as a result.

Martin feels he has not stayed long enough at his current school district; he would like to stay six more years and then retire. At one time, he applied at another district, a larger district offering a higher salary, but he was not selected. He stated that he would have accepted the position if offered the job because it was closer to his home and it offered more professional challenges. However, since that time he has been content with his work at his school district and has not searched for other employment.

As previously stated, Martin is a technician. As such, he believes that the ASBO technical competencies are most important to his employment longevity. In summary, Martin states

...if you don't know what you're doing in dealing with all the day to day information, or if you don't know what you're doing in dealing with balancing the checkbook, helping with payroll, helping with accounts payable, doing all the financial reports not only with the state but the federal, doing the budget and presenting a budget in a readable and useable fashion to the school board, you might as well give it up. I mean, that's the whole thing about running the school district.

**Jack**

Jack has been with his current school district for 30 years. He started as a part time bus driver then applied for a position in the business office. He held that position for two years, became assistant to the chief school business official, and was then promoted to chief school business official, a position he has held for 26 years. Jack has bachelors and masters degrees in business administration.

Throughout his career, Jack has been active in professional organizations. He served on numerous committees at the regional, state and national levels and has held offices in both state and national professional associations. Jack is also involved in community organizations such as chamber of commerce, senior citizen center, boy

scouts, and his church. His school district has an expectation of involvement in professional and community organizations.

As chief school business official, Jack has responsibility for all non-instructional areas within the school district. This includes technology, maintenance, food service, transportation and finance. His most important responsibility at this time is communicating the budget and fiscal challenges facing the school district to internal and external stakeholders.

Jack described an innovative project that significantly benefited his school district. The district was embarking on a major school construction effort and needed to issue general obligation bonds to finance the construction. Jack invited a bond rating agency to the school district to demonstrate justification for an increase in their bond rating prior to issuing the debt. This resulted in an upgrade to their bond rating which saved the district hundreds of thousands of dollars in financing fees. As Jack's career progressed and his employment longevity increased, he became involved in many projects outside his direct area of responsibility. He described this as a change from twenty-five years ago when Jack was "just doing the budget." Jack values being involved in all areas of the school district and values his role as a close consultant to the superintendent.

Jack spoke strongly of the importance of ethics in school business leadership. He used the example of being able to defend his decisions if they were on the front page of a major newspaper. Ethical decisions can be defended on the front page of a newspaper; unethical decisions cannot. Jack described an ethical dilemma involving a school district employee and misuse of a school district purchasing card. Jack's role was to collect

evidence, hire a private investigator, and then confront the individual with the superintendent. The employee eventually resigned but some school board members did not want the employee to leave because of the other valuable projects the employee worked on for the school district. This caused some dissension between the superintendent and the school board.

Job satisfaction for Jack comes from the respect and trust he has earned as a result of his longevity with the school district. He values the diversity of tasks as every day brings something different and challenging to his desk. Jack would like to have one more renewal of his contract and then retire. He has already thought of a transition plan for his replacement and has some ideas he is prepared to present to the school board. At this point, Jack does not expect further hierarchical advancement in his career.

The biggest frustration Jack described about his job is the lack of trust from the school board. This is fairly new in his school district resulting from a recent school board election. This lack of trust leads to second guessing and results in projects and decisions being delayed. Jack described this situation as improving as the school board works with the administration and gains more experience.

Jack is a humble chief school business official and diverts recognition to other members of his staff. However, his superintendent values recognition and provides informal recognition for good work and Jack appreciates that type of recognition.

Jack credits his employment longevity to the flexibility his job provides and the support system within his school district. He is a team player and has good relationships with coworkers, in particular the teacher's union. He has autonomy in his work and has an excellent relationship with his superintendent. Jack also describes the role of mentors

relative to his employment longevity. He had two mentors, one who was a supervisor who taught Jack the financial operations of a school district. His other mentor helped him with school board operations, staff relationships, and leadership.

Jack spoke strongly of the importance of professional associations in his career in particular, PASBO and ASBO. They provide “the ability to be kind of on the cutting edge of any knowledge and any news.” He feels PASBO professional development programs are most important in years one through ten of a chief school business official’s career. He believes that weaknesses exist in their professional development programs for chief school business officials with longevity. He mentioned the value of the ASBO Eagle Institute and its focus on leadership. He feels this is an excellent program for seasoned chief school business officials and that PASBO might do more with leadership trainings of this type. Jack does not plan any more formal education but he does plan to pursue the professional certification being offered through ASBO.

Relationships with superintendents and school boards have been very supportive over Jack’s career. The current school board started out as strained but it is getting better. When asked his strategies to deal with a difficult school board, he said he uses open, honest communication. One item of interest Jack mentioned was the difficulty of transitioning with a new superintendent relationship given his years of experience in the district and the credibility he has developed in the organization. He said he deals with this by involving the superintendent in activities he participates in and communicating frequently with the superintendent. Jack mentioned that his expertise and credibility, especially in dealing with contract negotiations, are important in dealing with conflict situations.

Jack has had a very successful career as chief school business administrator in his school district. Over his twenty-six years, he has never seriously thought of leaving the school district. Jack feels that the ASBO competencies most important to his employment longevity are the leadership competencies stated as follows:

You have to have a core of technical competencies. If you didn't understand how the finances or how the organization works, you couldn't be a leader. If you had no ethics, you're not going to be a leader. So they all kind of build into leadership.

### **Michael**

Michael is a very outgoing chief school business official with tremendous passion about his job. He has been the chief school business official at his current school district for just over ten years. Michael's school district is fairly large with enrollment of approximately 5,800 students. Prior to this position he was a chief school business official for a smaller school district and started his career in school business as an accounting supervisor for a third school system. In total Michael has seventeen years of experience in the field of school business leadership. Michael has a master's degree in educational administration and a bachelor's degree in accounting. For five years after college he worked in accounting and auditing in the private sector.

Michael is a member of PASBO but not a member of ASBO. He was an ASBO member for one year but does not find value in membership in that organization. He is not involved in committees at PASBO but is active in his regional chapter and with other county chief school business officials. Michael is a board member of a self-funded

workers compensation consortium, the local chamber of commerce and the local council of governments. Involvement in these organizations is not an expectation of his school district.

Michael has responsibility for leading the “non-education side of the business” with duties such as accounting, transportation, student attendance and registration, contract negotiations and facilities. Michael sees his most important responsibility as facilitating the supervisors that work for him. He has supervisors in all functional areas and he sees his role as facilitating their work and communicating these functions to the superintendent and the school board. The director of finance is a high functioning employee and Michael spoke often of this employee’s importance to his success as a chief school business official as well as his employment longevity.

An innovative project Michael coordinated for his school district involved negotiating with the transportation contractor to purchase a fuel tank in order to save money on fuel purchases. He also discussed a transition in the local taxing structure which he described as a great accomplishment given the current economic climate. The transition to the tax structure will have long term financial benefits to the school district. This project was valuable because it required significant public relations with the school board and community. Michael’s major work outside his area of responsibility is working on the strategic plan. He does not see this as particularly valuable to his position because he finds it difficult to put a cost on strategic initiatives.

Michael spoke strongly of the importance of ethics in the chief school business official position. He said it is a key component of his work and described ethics as setting a “precedent for everybody who looks up to your position and very clearly have a

rigid north star.” In other words, setting a high ethical standard is necessary for others to model for the benefit of the entire organization. Michael related an ethical dilemma that involved accepting tickets for sporting events or concerts from vendors. His superintendent and board policy prohibit it, even though other local business officials may accept them from time to time.

Job satisfaction comes to Michael mainly from the trust he has earned from his colleagues. Employees within the organization rely on Michael for his advice and expertise. He also values the teamwork within his departments and the respect of school board. He likes best about his job the challenges, variety of tasks, location of the school district (not in proximity to major newspaper so they can “fly under the radar”), and the autonomy in doing his work. He spoke of the difficulty adjusting to the leadership style of the superintendent when he first started at his school district. The superintendent had a very strong personality and liked to control everything. Once he got used to this style he came to respect the superintendent and the superintendent’s leadership of the school system.

The thing Michael likes least about his job is the commute to work which is over forty minutes one way, the long hours, and long school board meetings. However, the satisfaction he receives from the working conditions override the concern with the commute. Michael feels challenged in his work 75% of the time. The other portion of the time spent dealing with angry parents or taxpayers or attending certain meetings leaves him feeling unchallenged.

Being promoted was important to Michael early in his career in order to get to the position of chief school business official. After entering the field of school business,

Michael knew he wanted to become a chief school business official so promotion in that sense was a means to an end. Michael does not expect further hierarchical movement in his career as he has no desire to become a superintendent.

Recognition in Michael's organization comes from formal school board recognition, monthly community newsletters, and district office ceremonies. He mentions the need to be careful in receiving recognition because usually the recognition should go to his staff, stated as follows:

I've got to be careful not to be the one hogging it all as well, because the truth of the matter is when something does get done that's very good, they probably had a hand in it as much, equal to or better than I did, because they're doing the actual stuff. So I've got to be careful of that.

Michael values recognition in the form of a 9-0 vote on his contract, getting a paycheck and being treated well. Informal recognition is more important than formal recognition.

Michael attributes his employment longevity to satisfaction from the school board and the community, the location of the school district in relation to media outlets, and the change occurring in his school district. The school district has been growing in terms of student enrollment and that has opened some opportunities and challenges. He also relates a "good school board" to his employment longevity.

Michael has three mentors that are important to his career. Two are family friends who he relies on for counsel, in particular job advice and political advice. He also described his boss at a prior school district as a mentor, both formerly and currently. One

of Michael's most significant mentors is on the school board of another school district, so he receives a lot of job related advice from this mentor.

Regarding professional associations, Michael spoke highly of PASBO and its impact on his career. He values the up to date information, excellent job resources, and continuing education programs. He also values the networking opportunities PASBO provides. He believes an area of weakness is in lobbying for school districts and he feels PASBO is more reactive to legislative issues than proactive. Michael could not identify any professional development programs that would be beneficial to chief school business officials with longevity but highly values what PASBO currently offers. Michael does not plan more formal education or additional professional certifications.

Michael describes his relationships with superintendents as generally supportive. Upon initial employment at his current school district he had trouble adjusting to the superintendent's leadership style. The superintendent controlled everything and often had meetings with the school board without any other administrators present. Michael had to submit a daily schedule to the superintendent and had to be accountable for all his time. However, he adjusted to this leadership style and came to greatly respect the superintendent. Michael describes the current superintendent as the opposite, sometimes not decisive enough. But this superintendent offers more autonomy and flexibility to Michael in his work. He portrayed both superintendent relationships as supportive. Relations with the school board are now and have always been very supportive described by Michael as "just super professional."

Michael had an incident at his current school district that caused conflict, which was mainly internal. The school district was using a long term investment advisor

supported by the school board president. The investment advisor was making illegal investments and the school district lost money. As a result, Michael offered to resign his position because he felt a sense of responsibility as the chief school business official, although the loss was not his fault. The superintendent and school board supported Michael and would not accept his resignation. The school board president did not run for office in the next election.

Michael feels he has not stayed long enough in the school district. He thought of leaving right after he went there due to the superintendent's controlling leadership style. He would leave the school district for personal family reasons if necessary, a change in school board's philosophy, or negative publicity from the media. However, he does not see himself leaving in the near future.

Michael cited the ASBO professional standards related to leadership competencies as the most important to his employment longevity. He described the close relationship between ethics and leadership; that ethics is the strong foundation of a good leader. But given the size of his school district he needs to provide leadership that "people can believe in, the shareholders, the stakeholders, the taxpayers, everybody from taxpayers to the employees, they need to know that every dime that they give us in taxes, is going back out for the best education that we can possibly afford. And they have a right to come and say whether it is or it isn't being spent as they perceive it."

### **Melissa**

Melissa has a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's degree in school business leadership. She has been employed in her school district for twenty-three years, six years as administrative assistant to the superintendent, and seventeen as

the chief school business official. She has not worked anywhere else; in fact when Melissa started at her school district her goal was to become its chief school business official. After six years in the superintendent's office, she was promoted to chief school business official. She expects to remain at her school district in this position and does not expect any further hierarchical advancement. Melissa is also an adjunct instructor in at a local university. Melissa is a member of PASBO and ASBO and she has served in leadership positions in both state and regional school business organizations. Melissa is a very active chief school business official, participating in local school business initiatives as well as community service.

Melissa is responsible for support functions in her district, the normal accounting and finance functions as well as human resources, transportation and food service. She feels her most important responsibility is in finance, "getting the funds available channeled out to the educational program." Melissa described an innovative project she worked on in automating the business office in the areas of finance and student activity accounting. She also assisted in selecting student software which was outside her area of direct responsibility. On this project, she worked with employees from other departments and found the experience valuable.

Melissa spoke strongly of the need for ethics in her position. In fact, Melissa selected the ASBO ethical competencies as most important to her employment longevity as a chief school business official. She described herself as black or white in terms of ethics stating that "there's no gray area." Melissa would not want to see her name in the newspaper headlines for a decision that was not ethical and she uses this standard as the basis for ethical decision making. She stated that she has no problem speaking up when

ethics are involved. For example, when the food service director at her school district was suspected of embezzling money, Melissa led an internal investigation, obtained sufficient proof and then reported it to the superintendent, school board, local auditors, and state auditors. This level of reporting led to an investigation by the state Attorney General's Office.

Job satisfaction comes to Melissa through her ability to solve problems, as well as assisting others in doing their jobs or solving problems in collaboration with them. She described herself as a "problem-solver" and she loves to be challenged in this way. She also values the autonomy in her work and the variety of tasks she attends to each day. Sometimes the variety can become overwhelming and this inhibits Melissa's ability to attend to projects of interest. Melissa values time and wishes she had more of it to focus on projects that would benefit her district. She is frustrated that she does not have sufficient time to devote to higher level functions within her area of responsibility. Melissa would also like to be able to balance the school district's budget without worrying about raising taxes; she would appreciate additional state-level funding for her school district because of the support it would provide to the educational program and the community. Melissa feels challenged in her work most times due to changing rules and the increasingly complex nature of school budget issues.

There are no formal recognition programs in Melissa's district. Indeed, Melissa has an interesting perspective on being recognized for her work. She describes no negatives as recognition; she sets high expectations for herself and is content when she reaches her goals. She believes a clean audit report is enough recognition. Melissa describes recognition this way: "I'm not one that has to be told 'great job.' It's nice to

hear but it doesn't make or break me. So as long as I'm not hearing negative...then it must be good."

Melissa attributes her employment longevity to honesty, open communication, and her reputation for being a problem-solver. She also feels a lot of trust from people in the community as well as employees within her organization. Melissa also raised the geography of the area as an important issue; she has always lived in this region, went to college in this region, and is not looking to relocate to another area. "This is my hometown area. That's probably one of the things also that has allowed my longevity here, too, is that the people know me, they trust me."

Melissa did not have a business manager mentor when she started in the school district so she relied on colleagues in the county for technical advice relative to learning her job. The superintendent's secretary was a mentor to Melissa regarding work ethic and putting in the time to do the job effectively. PASBO was also important to Melissa early in her career especially workshops on timely topics in school business. "And even now, I don't know how a person in the role of administrator or business manager or whatever the title, can find the information out there on all the new laws, regulations, the things that we need .... if you didn't have that organization to turn to." Now her affiliation with PASBO is important in keeping her informed as rules change. She likes the webinar format for professional development because she is so far removed geographically from a central location for workshops. She has to balance the travel time against the value of interaction with other PASBO members. Melissa struggles with the value of PASBO professional development for veteran chief school business officials, in

particular finding topics of value to them. Melissa is not considering more formal education at this time; however she may pursue the new ASBO professional certification.

Melissa describes relationships with superintendents as supportive over the years. She had an incident with one superintendent who was making inappropriate comments, but the comments did not bother Melissa. However, he was apparently making similar comments to another staff member who reported this to the school board. Melissa was called in front of the school and asked about it and she answered the school board members honestly. As described previously, she deals with challenging situations with open communication and honesty. As a result, the superintendent left the school district.

Relationships with school boards have also been very supportive. Melissa has had individual challenges with board members; however her honesty and open communication is a strategy she used to deal with them. Another strategy Melissa used is to educate them with accurate information, particularly in the area of school finance. This strategy typically helps challenging board members become more supportive because they appreciate honest communication and accurate information.

Melissa feels she has not stayed long enough at her school district. She has no intention of leaving and has never thought of leaving. She would consider leaving if there was a lack of trust from the superintendent and school board, if they started to question everything and she got the feeling that they did not like the job she was doing. Melissa is very content with her school district and her role as its chief school business official.

**Glenn**

Glenn has been the chief school business official at his current school district for eleven years. He worked for two other school districts as the chief school business official and has a total of twenty-nine years of experience in school business administration. Glenn has an associate's degree in computer science technology and a bachelor's degree in business administration/accounting. During his entire career in school business, Glenn has been a member of PASBO and ASBO, but has never been active in either organization due to the significant time commitment out of his district. He went through the offices in his regional PASBO chapter and serves on the board of regional consortia for energy purchasing and health insurance. Glenn is active in the community through a local fire department, YMCA and his church. However, community service is not a specific expectation of his superintendent or school board.

Glenn feels the role of the chief school business official is to provide stability across the organization and the bridge the political gap between the school board, superintendent and the school organization. In terms of specific responsibilities, Glenn handles the typical school business functions: finance, transportation, food service, buildings and grounds and grant writing. His most important responsibility at this time is green energy initiatives. He has implemented several green energy projects such as geothermal, solar and wood projects. These initiatives have provided excellent public relations and recognition to the school district when other more negative news might have gained the attention of the community. Glenn was successful in obtaining several grants for his school district to implement alternative energy projects. He spoke

extensively about green energy initiatives; this seems to be his passion and renewed the challenge in his job.

Glenn spoke very strongly of ethics and the relevance of ethical behavior in his job. He described ethics as honesty in all dealings which builds trust among those with whom he works. As Glenn described it: “If I don’t know an answer, I say I don’t know; I’ve never been one to try to make up the answer. I’d rather tell people, I don’t know the exact answer, I’d rather not give you the answer, I’ll look it up and get back to you.” He feels the superintendent, board and staff trust him because of his strong ethical base. Glenn was being interviewed for a job once and he was asked by the superintendent what he would do if the superintendent asked him to do something he disagreed with or found ethically compromising. Glenn said that he would go to the board president. Glenn described his feeling at that time “And I knew at that point in the interview that I might as well forget this, nor did I want to work for the person that even asked me that question.” As further evidence of his solid ethical base, Glenn left his long-term involvement with the fire company due to an uncomfortable ethical situation. Further, Glenn chose the ASBO ethical competencies as being most important to his employment longevity, stating

From our seat, I think it is the ethics. From the more political seats, why do superintendents only average three to five years a clip anymore? But I still think for myself at this point and why I’ve been able to stay where I’ve been, and it’s the ethics and just people knowing that they will turn to me to get the most honest answer.

Job satisfaction comes to Glenn from trust within the organization from co-workers, the community and the school board. This trust affords him the opportunity to try new initiatives:

I think being able to pursue things like the green energy here, I think the trust and those things that are built as a foundation does allow you flexibility when it comes time that you want to do something and the board believes in you enough that they're willing to say okay, go ahead and try that and let's hope it works. And not even hope it works, we know it'll work if you're saying it's going to work.

Glenn is satisfied in his job because he is able to try new things and has flexibility in his work. Having a variety of tasks is very important to him because he gets bored easily. The thing he likes best about his job is the human interaction and having everyone involved in success of a project and the success of the organization. On the opposite side of job satisfaction, Glenn is frustrated by negative personnel issues such as terminating employees and conducting internal investigations. He describes this frustration as "poisonous people to the organization." He is also frustrated by the political climate and negative interpersonal relationships that sometimes occur. However, Glenn still enjoys his job and feels challenged in his work, especially the new challenges lately in the field of school business and the challenges related to the current economic climate.

Promotion was important to Glenn early in his career, in particular being promoted to the chief school business official position. He does not expect any further

hierarchical advancement. He is comfortable with the size of his school district and would not leave to go to a larger school district. Glenn lives in his current school district and has mixed feelings about working in his home school district; however in general the positives outweigh the negatives.

Outstanding performance is recognized in the form of school board and superintendent support. Glenn prefers informal recognition and is very uncomfortable in the 'limelight.' Informal recognition comes from positive comments from the superintendent, school board and community. He describes being rewarded as knowing that the school board does not want him to leave and knowing that they value what he does for the school district. In five years, Glenn feels that chief school business officials will be competing with each other for jobs due to school district consolidation. He is proud of his accomplishments and believes his school district is in a great position to successfully merge with another district(s).

Glenn believes that the factors that contribute to his employment longevity are trust, honesty, and ethics. He mentioned two specific mentors as being important to his career longevity, a former superintendent who mentored him in the areas of management and leadership, and the business manager he worked under when he first entered the field of school business in the technical aspects of being a chief school business official. Glenn also described the importance of PASBO in his career; in particular the opportunities to network with other school business officials and the professional development offerings. He also mentioned the extensive benchmarking data available from PASBO as important to him in performing his job. Glenn is considering additional formal education in school business leadership, but has not yet made a decision.

Relationships with superintendents have been generally supportive. Glenn mentioned some minor challenges and he overcame them through private conversations and being polite when dealing with sensitive issues; being considerate of the other person's perspective. Glenn also mentioned that he left a prior school district due to a strained relationship with the superintendent and assistant superintendent. However, Glenn described his relationships with school boards as extremely supportive due to the trust built up over time through ethical behavior and honesty.

When Glenn decides to leave his current school district, he wants it to be on a good note and he struggles with the right time. He is not ready to leave yet but he would consider leaving due to an ethical conflict, if he got too bored, or for a better opportunity for personal growth, but not necessarily with another school district. However, he is not bored and stated that the time is not right to leave.

### **Gino**

Gino holds a bachelor's and master's degree in business administration and started his career in school business leadership thirty-five years ago. His first position was as assistant business manager in a neighboring district. He came to his current school district as assistant business manager because he was offered more money and he saw greater opportunity here. He was assistant business manager for five years and then promoted to chief school business official, a position he has held for twenty-one years.

Gino is a member of both PASBO and ASBO. He has served on various regional and state-wide committees as well as the board of directors. Gino found this experience extremely beneficial to his career and highly recommends it to other chief school business officials. His community involvement is mainly with his church; however there

is not an expectation from his superintendent or school board that he participate in community service organizations.

Gino's position is responsible for all non-instructional operations of the school district,

basically everything that's involved in the school district that doesn't have to do with education reports through me. We bring the kids to school, we provide them with their books, we provide them with the electricity, we provide them with the lunch program, and we take them home. So everything that's not instructional reports to me. We're the chief financial people for an \$86 million organization, 600 employees.

Gino describes his position in terms of leading the business functions. Due to the size of his school district he has several managers that report to him. For this reason, Gino chose the ASBO leadership competencies as most important to his employment longevity. Gino feels his most important responsibility is leading the school district in the area financial operations, in particular the financial stability of the school district. Gino was successful in getting the school district bond rating increased a few years ago; he was very proud of that because it helped his school district save money. Gino described two innovative projects both of which were outside his area of direct responsibility. One was in special education by researching the number of identified students and outside placements. The other was searching for a new student information system. He found both projects valuable because he was able to save the school district money and time through the results of these efforts. He also described working with his

county to tighten up delinquent tax collection procedures which helped all school districts in the county. Gino is proud of his roots in the community and the connections it provides him to do his job better especially knowing the local legislators and local police chiefs.

Gino spoke strongly of the importance of ethics in his position. He described it as being able to look at himself in the mirror every morning knowing that he did the right thing. He described ethics as "...you're not going to make 100% correct decisions. But as long as you know that you made it for the right reason, that it's for the community, then that's how I view it, just in real simple terms." Gino could not describe a specific ethical dilemma he faced but he spoke of a school board member who was out to get him because she felt he was the wrong race. Eventually that member left the school board.

Job satisfaction comes from Gino's freedom to "develop the bench." He used this term to describe the importance of developing a good team and finding those who can do the work when he is not be around; those who can work independently. The thing he likes best about his job is the people he works with, the uncertainty of what each day will bring, the variety of work, and the challenges his job brings. He spoke of the need to manage his autonomy at the present time due to a very strong Board president, but he values the ability to have autonomy over his work. Gino described managing his autonomy as "the art of letting someone have it your way." Job frustration is caused by the school board and the school district's financial situation. He feels the governor's action towards poor schools is immoral and is having a significant negative impact on his school district. The thing he likes least about his job is the first week of school each year and the little problems that come his way especially dealing with parent complaints about

transportation. Gino still feels challenged in his work due to the daily variety of tasks that need to be accomplished.

Promotion was only important to Gino for the opportunity it provided to become a chief school business official, and for increases in pay early in his career. However, it is not important now and Gino does not expect any further hierarchical advancement; he has no interest in becoming a superintendent at this point in his career.

Outstanding performance is not really recognized in Gino's school district other than a volunteer recognition held annually. Gino prefers informal recognition; however at a recent school board meeting they surprised Gino with his professional registration renewal certificate and Gino said "that felt good." Gino spoke of the value to him of being told "nice job" and "I appreciate what you did, thanks a lot" and one of his goals is to use more informal recognition with his own staff.

Gino may be retired in five years, although in our conversation it is evident that he is conflicted about it. He likes his job and the daily challenges and thinks he would be bored in retirement. But he has thirty-six years in the retirement system and he could retire any time; so he is considering his options. Gino has developed a transition plan (built the bench) and is hopeful that the school board will promote internally when he retires. He believes the people he hired are ready.

Gino feels that his employment longevity at his current school district is the result of a great community where he has established roots. He knew early on that he wanted to be the chief school business official in the school district he grew up in so he pursued this job and then stayed. He also attributed his employment longevity to the team he built at his school district, relationships with people in the school district and the community, and

the rapport he established with local legislators and police chiefs. Gino described his three rules for survival: never take things personally, never question why a board member votes the way they vote, and never compromise confidentiality. These rules are also factors in his employment longevity.

Gino described the importance of two mentors in his career. One was a former business manager who taught him about the field of school business. The other was a colleague who was his leadership mentor from whom Gino learned the importance of being himself – “Be who you are. I can’t be you, you can’t be me, but you just look and you learn what works for you.”

Professional organizations have had an immense impact on Gino’s career. He spoke of the collegiality and networking that his PASBO membership provides. Fellow business managers were very important as his career developed, in particular the relationships built from meetings and retreats. Gino does not discount the need for quality professional development programs offered by PASBO, but feels the networking opportunities are more important to his employment longevity. Gino will continue with appropriate job-related training, but does not plan more formal education or additional professional certifications.

Gino worked for twelve superintendents over his career and the relationships have all been supportive. Gino said that he was able to provide stability during the transition times and this was important to him for the benefit of his school district. Gino is up front with his superintendents and speaks his mind with them. However, he recognizes that the superintendent is the boss and he must support decisions made by the superintendent. Gino describes school board relationships as “supportive for the most part.” He deals

with board members honestly and is respectful of them. He admits to the Board when he is wrong which builds trust. He describes his school board member relations as

not everyone's going to agree with me, but you're going to hear what you're going to hear and when it's all said and done, you have five votes, that's fine. You don't get five votes, that's fine, nothing personal. Don't hold a grudge. I don't; go on to the next issue. Be honest with them, be fair with them, be up-front with them and show them respect and treat them with niceness.

Gino feels he has been with his district the right amount of time. The only reason he would leave is for retirement purposes but he would need something to occupy his time. Gino thought about leaving and actually interviewed at another district. However, when the board found out he was considering leaving the school district they offered him more money and a new job title to stay. Other than that time, Gino rarely thought of leaving the school district.

### **Daniel**

Daniel worked as an assistant county treasurer before entering the field of school business management. After eight years with the county, he accepted the position of chief school business official with his current school district, a position he has held for thirteen years. Daniel holds a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's degree in business administration. He is a member of PASBO, but not ASBO. He is also a member of the Government Finance Officers Association. He is not active in either organization and never has been. He helps with his children's little league baseball and basketball leagues and sometimes speaks at local service organization meetings such as

Rotary Club. There is no community service expectation from his superintendent or school board.

Daniel describes his position responsibilities as 25% chief operating officer and 75% chief financial officer. He supervises the typical operational departments including transportation, food service, facilities and human resources and there is a supervisor for each department who reports to him. Daniel feels his most important responsibility is in the area of school finance and the budget in particular. An innovative project Daniel described is enhancing cash flow for his district in order to maximize interest income. He also felt he has improved communication with the school board, in particular financial information. A project Daniel worked on outside his area of normal responsibility is a building project. He did not consider himself to be knowledgeable in this area when he came into school business; in fact he described this as being “outside my comfort zone.” However, he learned a lot and found this experience to be very valuable.

Daniel described ethics as doing “the right thing all the time. Probably I think the most important thing that we do as far as our responsibility in the business office. I think we need to stay above even the slight hint of impropriety...we need to really hold ourselves above everyone else in the district.” Daniel said he should be able to justify everything he does if it appears on the front page of the newspaper and he needs to keep in mind how the average person in the public views the actions that he takes. Daniel used very strong ethical statements in describing the importance to his job responsibilities in developing trust. Daniel could not describe an ethical dilemma over the course of his career because, as he stated, “I try not to put myself in that position.”

Job satisfaction comes from the relationships Daniel has with the superintendent, school board and his staff. He described those as three key relationships to providing a good working environment and job contentment. He also values autonomy in his work and the variety of tasks he is challenged with each day. The thing he likes best about his job is working with the finances of the district and especially accounting. He described himself as having an “accountant mentality.” Daniel is frustrated by the stress of taxes and budget constraints, especially Act 1 of 2006 which placed limits on school boards’ ability to increase taxes. He feels the pressure of being responsible for others’ jobs and stated “Now I feel a big weight on my shoulders as far as if we do have to lay people off, or people are really making decisions on the numbers that I provide, so that responsibility is stressful.” Daniel wishes he had more focused time to work on tasks that could benefit his school district. He says he is always “putting fires out here and there and answering questions.” He also dislikes the adversarial relationship with the media. Daniel is challenged by his job although before the Act 1 changes and the economic downturn he admitted it was becoming somewhat routine. But that is not the case now. He is content in his job and does not expect any further hierarchical advancement because he is not interested in becoming a superintendent.

Outstanding performance is recognized through informal comments from the superintendent and school board which he described as very important to him. He also believes that having his contract renewed and receiving pay increases is a form of recognition. He values informal recognition over formal recognition and said he is most comfortable as a “behind the scenes” type of person.

Daniel has stayed in his current school district because he has been able to use his personal and professional strengths in his job. Personal strengths are the ability to establish strong relationships with co-workers, the superintendent and school board. And professional strengths are in the areas of accounting and public finance. Daniel struggled with deciding which of the category of ASBO competencies were most important to his employment longevity. He was torn between technical competencies and ethical competencies. When pressed he chose ethical competencies because “if you can’t be trusted, then the other things don’t really matter.”

Daniel described two mentors who were important in his career. The county treasurer he worked for and the chief clerk at the county. The county treasurer took Daniel to conferences and meetings and taught him about public finance. The chief clerk taught Daniel about leadership and the importance of managing people. He said the chief clerk used to place hand written notes on his and other employees’ desks and he found this very motivating as an employee.

PASBO has been a critical resource in Daniel’s career development as a chief school business official. He values the professional development through webinars and workshops as well as the networking opportunities with other chief school business officials. Both were very important when Daniel started his school business career. Daniel also values the collegial relationships with local business administrators, in particular within his vocational technical school area. Daniel has considered additional formal education through taking some courses in a school business leadership master’s program but has not yet made a commitment. He is considering pursuing professional certification as a chief school business official either through PASBO or ASBO.

Daniel worked for three superintendents in his current school district and the relationships have all been very supportive. Likewise relationships with school boards have been very supportive. He described a contentious board member when he first started at his school district. The school board president came to his office and requested to take all the invoices off site to his place of business. Daniel relayed his concerns about taking the invoices out of the school district and the president did not appreciate the questioning. One year after Daniel was hired the board member was voted off the board and there have not been problems since then. Daniel was advised to deal with contentious board members by flooding them with information. Another career conflict arose for Daniel during contract negotiations. He met with the teacher's representative who misconstrued and misrepresented the numbers he presented. This put him in a bad position with the school board. The situation was resolved through a meeting of all parties in the same room to discuss and iron out the differences.

Daniel is happy with the district now and is not considering leaving. He considered leaving once because he was becoming bored and thought a larger school district might provide more challenges. He actually started looking for other opportunities but did not take specific action towards another job. However, his job became more challenging due to changing rules and regulations regarding public finance, and he decided to stay and has not looked since. A particular concern about leaving is relocating his family. However, Daniel would leave the school district if relationships with the superintendent and school board turned bad. However, at this time Daniel is content at his current school district and has no plans to leave.

## **Emergent Themes**

While the participants in this study varied in their backgrounds, school district size, education level, age and years of experience, several common themes emerged from the interview data. The themes that emerged were consistent across all participants and there were no differences based on school size as anticipated by the criteria used in the participant selection process. The themes that emerged based on the interview data were ethics, relationships, job challenge, autonomy and mentors.

### **Ethics**

Based on data collected in the interviews, it appeared that participants in this study had a solid ethical foundation as the basis for their employment longevity. Strong ethical language was used when asked to describe their definition of ethics and when asked to provide an example of an ethical dilemma they faced. School districts are public institutions and decisions are subject to disclosure in the media. Many respondents used the 'newspaper definition' to describe ethics. That is, the need to be able to defend decisions if they were printed on the front page of the newspaper as their ethical compass. Both Jack and Melissa described serious ethical situations that required their involvement; one involved stealing money from the food service operation and the other involved using a school district purchasing card for personal use. Both of these chief school business officials directed the investigation and notified appropriate authorities when guilt was determined. Both Jack and Melissa were concerned about the negative impact of these situations on their school districts; in particular the potential erosion of trust within their departments. Other participants left a prior job because of an ethical situation that made them uncomfortable and was outside their ethical frame of reference.

Glenn was a long-time member of the local fire department and he left the organization over an ethical situation involving proper certification of another member. Further, he did not accept a prior job offer when the superintendent asked him a question during the interview that had the potential to compromise his ethics.

Participants used the words honesty, trust, open communication, integrity, respect and credibility when describing the importance of ethics in carrying out their job responsibilities. Participants said that they would not be able to do their jobs effectively if they did not have the trust and respect of those they work with each day. Trust of the members of the organization and the community is vital when managing the financial operation of multi-million dollar school districts. Operating with a solid ethical base in all situations builds trust and therefore credibility in the work of the chief school business official. All respondents work very hard to uphold the standards of ethical behavior in their professional practice. Some participants felt the need to model ethical behavior for the benefit of the entire organization. Further, this high ethical standard provides the basis to build effective relationships with the superintendent, school board, co-workers and the community.

When asked which category of the ASBO professional standards was most important to their employment longevity, four of the nine participants responded with ethical competencies, four with leadership competencies and one with technical competencies. However, participants had trouble separating ethics from leadership and described the importance of ethics in effective leadership. Table 5 provides responses regarding the ASBO competencies most important to employment longevity.

Table 5

*ASBO Competencies*

Name	Category of ASBO Professional Standards Most Important to Employment Longevity
Edward	Leadership
Caroline	Ethical
Martin	Technical
Jack	Leadership
Michael	Leadership
Melissa	Ethical
Glenn	Ethical
Gino	Leadership
Daniel	Ethical

**Relationships**

Participants in this study reported supportive relationships with their superintendents over the term of their employment with the school district. They described the importance of the chief school business official/superintendent relationship to their employment longevity. Six of the participants specifically mentioned that a bad relationship with the superintendent would cause them to leave the organization. One chief school business official left a prior organization because of a strained relationship with the superintendent. Caroline specifically mentioned the issue of “bad confrontation” with the administration and school board as a reason to consider leaving the organization. She distinguished between good and bad confrontation, stating that good confrontation is productive and bad confrontation is not. Further, participants described the need to foster honest, open communication with the superintendent. Chief school business officials related their ability to have a very frank dialogue with their superintendents about issues in private, but then the need to be supportive of the superintendent once decisions were

made. This level of communication leads to a beneficial relationship that provides job satisfaction to chief school business officials.

Likewise, relationships with school board members were also reported as generally supportive. Although participants described challenging issues at times with individual school board members, these situations were handled with open, honest communication and as a result, the relationship improved. Typically, these challenges were short-lived either due to intentional relationship-building on the part of the chief school business official, or the school board member leaving the board. When asked what would cause the chief school business official to leave the school district, a common theme was a negative relationship with the superintendent or school board. From the interview data, relationship with the superintendent was the most critical to employment longevity.

Relationships with co-workers were also important to employment longevity. Participants described the ability to work as a team as a factor in their desire to stay with their school district. Most had been able to make hiring decisions over the term of their employment to build these relationships. Participants also made hiring decisions looking to the future in terms of seeking skills that complement theirs and hiring someone who may be able to take over for them when they leave the organization. Some participants were near retirement age and were concerned about the future of the organization upon their exit. Participants also reported job satisfaction through development of co-workers and building capacity within the business office and the organization.

## **Job Challenge**

Participants reported the significant continual challenges in their jobs as important to employment longevity. All reported being challenged each day through the variety of tasks built into their job functions. Some of the challenges were a result of current economic conditions causing decreased revenue and the need to work with staff to identify areas of cost reduction. Other challenges were related to changes in state law and regulations, mainly related to budget development issues such as Act 1 of 2006 which constrains the school board's ability to raise taxes to support the educational program. Further, chief school business officials have a broad range of responsibilities within the non-instructional, operational side of the organization and this variety provides ongoing challenges. A typical day can consist of working in the areas of pupil transportation, facilities, technology, child accounting, finance, human resources and school board operations. This variety was important to participants; in fact some reported thoughts of leaving the organization at times when the challenges and variety were not so great.

## **Autonomy**

Autonomy was a common theme reported by chief school business officials relative to their employment longevity. Participants liked being able to determine the best course of action and timeline to accomplish assigned tasks. Chief school business officials also appreciated autonomy in hiring personnel for their departments, "developing the bench" as Gino described it. They did not feel micro-managed by either the superintendent or school board. They were satisfied to receive an assignment and then work independently to complete it. Participants also related the importance of

having flexibility in their jobs, both in terms of work assignments and work schedules. They liked being able to assign tasks to other staff members at their own discretion as well as the ability to attend meetings, conferences and be out of the office as their work load dictates. Many participants were involved in professional organizations and appreciated the autonomy and flexibility to attend functions that would enhance their job skills through professional development and networking with colleagues.

### **Mentors**

Participants related the importance of mentors both in their career development and their employment longevity. The chief school business official is responsible for many important technical functions within a school system. These requirements can change frequently based on the legal and political environment and it is important for chief school business officials to maintain their skills and job knowledge through effective professional development. Also, chief school business officials are leaders within their organizations and must be able to work with all levels of staff including school board members, superintendents, co-workers and subordinates.

To this end, participants described the importance of two types of mentors: technical and leadership. Participants had mentors in their careers who guided them on the technical aspects of their jobs, such as financial reporting requirements, pupil transportation regulations, human resources and accounting rules. They also had mentors related to leadership issues including managing employees, working with the school board, and effective communication. While the technical mentors were important early in their careers, leadership mentors were important to employment longevity because this

type mentoring allowed them to build effective relationships in their current school districts.

Another type of mentoring described by participants was through professional organizations, especially PASBO. PASBO provides ongoing professional development for school business officials relative to timely school business issues, and law and regulation changes from the state and the Department of Education. Professional development is in the form of webinars and face-to-face workshops. Therefore, this professional development is an important part of participants' employment longevity. Further, through the regional structure of the PASBO organization business officials gather periodically to discuss items of mutual concern. These networking opportunities were also critical to the chief school business officials carrying out their job responsibilities effectively. Therefore, current colleagues were considered as mentors to chief school business officials with employment longevity.

### **Summary**

Information was provided for the nine participants who were interviewed for this research study. A synopsis of the participants was provided, participant interviews were summarized, and emergent themes were presented. The themes that emerged from the interview data were ethics, relationships, job challenge, autonomy and mentors. A summary, conclusions and recommendations relative to the research questions will be presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

This qualitative research study addressed employment longevity and career plateauing of chief school business officials in Pennsylvania. The results of this study provide descriptions of how participants experienced employment longevity and career plateauing. This chapter will answer the research questions and present conclusions and recommendations based on data collected from nine semi-structured interviews with chief school business officials with employment longevity.

#### **Research Question One**

What are the attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania?

The attributes that contribute to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania are a strong ethical frame of reference, effective relationships, job challenge, autonomy, and ongoing mentoring.

#### **Ethics**

A strong ethical frame of reference contributes to employment longevity of the chief school business official in Pennsylvania. All participants interviewed for this study related the importance of ethics in carrying out their job functions. Hartman and Stefkovich (2004) present five ethical frameworks that guide decisions of school business officials: Ethic of Justice, Ethic of Care, Ethic of Power, Ethic of Community, and Ethic of the Profession. Data from participant interviews support these frameworks. Ethic of Justice relates to decisions being based on law and regulations. All participants related the importance of keeping up with changing laws and regulations so that expert guidance

could be provided to the superintendent and school board. The Ethic of Care means that concern is given to empathy and relationships. In carrying out job functions, chief school business officials stressed the need to maintain the trust and respect of those with whom they worked, as well as the importance of maintaining their credibility as the chief steward of the school system's financial resources. The Ethic of Power relates to questioning laws, rules and the status quo. Participants were constantly looking for ways to improve their organizations and methods of carrying out their job functions. They reported legislative involvement to effect change if they believed it would improve their organizations. The Ethic of Community addresses consideration of community standards, taxpayers and other stakeholders. Chief school business officials were sensitive to the needs of the community, professional colleagues and taxpayers in carrying out their responsibilities. The Ethic of the Profession considers the standards of the profession and use of professional judgment. Participants were all members of their state professional association (PASBO) and many were very active with committee work and conducting professional development sessions in order to improve the profession.

Jacoby (2004) related the importance of character for an educational leader and that ethical behavior will set the tone for others inside and outside the organization. He identified public, personal and family virtues of leadership relative to effective performance in the school business profession. These describe characteristics such as good reputation, dignified, not contentious, free from love of money, and self-controlled. Chief school business officials were concerned with their reputations in the organization and the community and the need to be seen as a trustworthy leader. They described the importance of ethical standards in building trust and credibility for the school district.

Chief school business officials were sensitive to always making decisions that could be defended based on the ethical standards of the community.

### **Relationships**

Relationships were identified as contributing to employment longevity of the chief school business official. The most important relationship was between the chief school business official and the superintendent. However, the relationship with the school board was critical as well. This finding supports other relationship research relative to employment longevity (Alsbury, 2003; Freese, 2003; Sebert, 2006; Weininger & Stout, 1989). These researchers focused on the superintendent and school board relationship rather than relationships involving the chief school business official; however they related the importance of the primary reporting relationships within the organization to employment longevity. Sebert (2006) specifically identified relationship-building abilities as a factor influencing superintendent longevity. Likewise, Freese (2003) recommended that preparatory programs for superintendents include training specific to school board relations. Interview data from this study support the importance of relationships in employment longevity for chief school business officials.

Several participants in this study stated that they would leave their current school districts if the relationship with the superintendent or school board became negative. Chief school business officials have to work closely with the superintendent and school board in order to be effective in their jobs. While all participants reported supportive relationships with their superintendents, a few related isolated strained relationships with individual school board members. The school board member issues were resolved rather quickly through open communication so they were not long lasting. The fact that all

reported supportive superintendent relationships led to the conclusion that this relationship was more important than school board relationships. However, both are important to employment longevity.

### **Job Challenge**

All chief school business officials reported being significantly challenged in their jobs. Therefore, this is identified as an attribute that contributes to employment longevity. Chief school business officials are responsible for the non-instructional, operational aspects of the school system including accounting, budgeting, finance, human resources, facilities and transportation. This broad scope of job duties brings variety and challenge. Also, economic conditions that result in declining revenues and changing budgeting rules require the chief school business official to work differently. Some participants reported times in their tenure when they were becoming somewhat bored with their jobs. At these times, they considered leaving the organization to look for a position with greater challenges. Bardwick (1986) describes this as a content plateau. Overcoming a content plateau is necessary for employment longevity. These chief school business officials overcame their content plateau through renewed challenges and they decided to stay with their current school district. This relates the importance of job challenge to employment longevity.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy means allowing employees to accomplish their work in their own way in their own time, and allowing them to work with a team of their preference (Pink, 2009). Pink describes the four essentials of autonomy leading to increased job motivation: task (what will be accomplished), time (when it will be done), technique

(how it will be completed), and team (who will be involved). Providing autonomy in any or all four areas leads to motivated, productive workers which can result in employment longevity. Chief school business officials interviewed for this study related the importance of autonomy in carrying out their job functions. They reported little micro-management from their superintendents or school boards. They described the flexibility and variety in their jobs and their ability to decide how best to accomplish assigned tasks in terms of time, technique and team. Autonomy is an intrinsic motivator that provides job satisfaction (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993; Pink, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000). Participants in this study reported significant autonomy in their jobs which provided them with increased job satisfaction and contributed to their employment longevity.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring related to employment longevity of chief school business officials came in two forms. The first is the importance of mentors in the areas of technical competence and leadership competence. All participants stated the value of mentors in their career development and employment longevity. The second form of mentorship is ongoing through their state professional association, the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO). PASBO provides professional development in areas crucial to school business leadership such as finance, facilities, transportation, human resources, legal issues and current events. PASBO also provides networking opportunities with other chief school business officials. These forms of mentorship allow chief school business officials to keep current on their knowledge of school business operations as well as being able to consult with other professionals related to technical or

leadership issues. These mentorship findings support research relative to mentoring in other positions in education such as teachers (Coronado, 2009; Matthews, 2003) and principals (Hertting, 2008).

### **Research Question Two**

Which category of the ASBO Professional Standards is most important to employment longevity: leadership competencies, technical competencies, or ethical competencies?

The Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO) developed professional standards for the chief school business official that established competencies required for success in the position (ASBO, 2006a). For the purposes of this study, the ASBO standards were categorized as leadership competencies, technical competencies and ethical competencies. Leadership competencies include organization and administration, public policy and intergovernmental relations, and legal issues. Technical competencies include job-specific skills required to complete daily tasks such as financial resource management, human resource management, facilities management, property acquisition and management, information management and ancillary services. Ethical competencies include ethical standards, ethical conduct and personal and professional integrity. The complete description of these categories is provided in Appendix A (p. 131).

Participants were asked which category of ASBO competencies was most important to their employment longevity. Four participants chose leadership competencies, four chose ethical competencies and one chose technical competencies.

Some respondents had a difficult time answering this question, in particular between leadership and ethical competencies. As summarized by Edward,

....leadership competencies is probably the most important because you're the number three person. Actually you're the number one person when it comes to the financial and business side of the district, unless you happen to have a superintendent who has that background. But I would not underplay the ethical part, really, because they go so much hand in hand, leadership and ethical.

They believed all the competencies were essential to their employment longevity. They also suggested that many of the competencies were interrelated and could not be isolated to stand on their own as best described by Jack,

I'd probably say leadership because you couldn't get to that without the others. You have to have a core of technical competencies. If you didn't understand how the finances or how the organization works, you couldn't be a leader. If you had no ethics, you're not going to be a leader. So they all kind of build into leadership. I mean...they're all kind of important.

### **Research Question Three**

Do long-term chief school business officials experience career plateauing?

Three types of career plateaus were considered in this research study:

organizational or structural plateau, content plateau, and personal plateau. A structural plateau occurs when an employee desires a higher level job but no opportunities exist because of the structure of the organization (Stoner, Ference, Warren & Christensen,

1980). A content plateau results from the developmental aspects of the job when an employee no longer feels challenged by the work or job responsibilities (Bardwick, 1986). A personal plateau means that the employee does not want a higher-level job; the employee is content with their place in the organization and the level of their job responsibilities (Stoner, Ference, Warren & Christensen, 1980).

All chief school business officials interviewed in this research study are structurally plateaued. They are at the highest level in the organization and they have no desire for hierarchical advancement. The only upward movement available to them is to become superintendents and none reported the desire to do so, even though a recent state law change would allow those with a graduate degree in business to apply for superintendent certification.

From the results of this research study, chief school business officials with employment longevity are not content plateaued. All participants reported feeling continually challenged in their jobs. Bardwick (1986) states that challenges can be provided by change that results from new issues, situations and problems. This is continual in the careers of the chief school business officials interviewed so a content plateau did not occur with the participants.

This finding was not anticipated by the researcher based on personal experience. The researcher is a chief school business official with employment longevity as defined in this study. The researcher has experienced content plateauing and has taken action to mitigate the impact of a content plateau through increased involvement in professional organizations and further formal education. It may be that current economic conditions

are providing sufficient challenge to chief school business officials and that this result may be different if a similar study was conducted during improved economic conditions.

The chief school business officials participating in this study are personally plateaued. They all were satisfied in their jobs and their school districts and had no desire to leave or look for another position. Further, they had no desire for hierarchical advancement in their organizations. Therefore, from the results of this study, chief school business officials experience a structural and personal plateau, but not a content plateau.

#### **Research Question Four**

What strategies do chief school business officials use to mitigate the impact of career plateauing?

Stoner, et al. (1980) provides typical responses of employees who are structurally plateaued. One is that they build an outlet for the needs not being provided by the job to include additional involvement in community and professional organizations. Chief school business officials with employment longevity reported some involvement in community organizations such as the chamber of commerce, boy scouts, fire department, and local health agencies. More importantly, all chief school business officials were involved in professional associations including PASBO regional chapters and state-wide committees, health insurance trusts, local tax collection committees or workers compensation consortia. Another response to a structural career plateau described by Stoner et. al is to grow the current job by expanding job duties. Chief school business officials with employment longevity reported involvement with projects outside their normal job functions. Such projects included assistance to other departments or

employees with computer applications, student enrollment projects in the special education department, green energy initiatives, researching year-round schooling and educational foundations. Therefore, chief school business officials are considered effective plateauees from a structural perspective according to Stoner, et al. (1980).

Shecket (1995) studied content plateauing relative to community college educators. He identified coping strategies such as increased faculty involvement and professional development. Mentoring can also mitigate the influence of a career plateau (Foster, Shastri & Withane, 2004; Lentz & Allen, 2009). Bardwick (1986) believes that continual learning and providing additional challenge can be effective in overcoming a career plateau. Participants identified the importance of professional development and networking to keep current in their job knowledge. They also reflected on the role of mentoring in their careers, both early career mentors and current mentors. One participant described the value of now being a mentor to younger chief school business officials.

All of these strategies are used by chief school business officials with longevity, although maybe not intentional. Chief school business officials with employment longevity are highly motivated leaders dedicated to doing their jobs well. This level of motivation leads them to naturally participate in the activities cited to mitigate a career plateau. Therefore, highly motivated employees may not experience a content plateau. Indeed challenge is the most important method of mitigating a career plateau, and challenge is constant for the chief school business officials participating in this research study.

## **Conclusions**

A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to conduct this research study of employment longevity and career plateauing of chief school business officials in Pennsylvania. The results of this study provide descriptions of how participants experienced employment longevity and career plateauing and therefore the results cannot be used to make generalizations or predictions. Nine chief school business officials with employment longevity were interviewed using a semi-structured interview method to identify attributes that contribute to employment longevity, to identify the category of ASBO professional standards most important employment longevity and to address the issue of a career plateau with chief school business officials. Attributes that contribute to employment longevity were identified as ethics, relationships, job challenges, autonomy and mentoring. The categories of leadership competencies and ethical competencies were most important to employment longevity and it was determined that chief school business officials with employment longevity experience structural and personal plateaus, but not content plateaus. Content plateaus are not experienced because of the significant challenges to the role of the chief school business official in a school system, the changing legal and regulatory environment, and the need for continued professional development. It appears that strategies to mitigate a structural plateau are inherent in the job of a chief school business official with employment longevity.

The theoretical framework for this study was motivation theory. Daniel Pink's Motivation 3.0 and Frederick Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation were underlying this research. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors constitute the emergent themes relative to employment longevity in this study: ethics, relationships, job

challenges, autonomy and mentoring. Intrinsic factors include autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Pink, 2009); competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000); achievement, recognition, responsibility and the work itself (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993). Extrinsic factors include technical supervision, company policy and administration, working conditions, salary and interpersonal supervision (Herzberg, Mausner & Snyderman, 1993; Maidani, 1991). The emergent themes relating to extrinsic factors include relationships and mentoring (supervision), while emergent themes relating to intrinsic factors include ethics, job challenges and autonomy (the work itself). Throughout the interviews, intrinsic factors were more evident to the researcher relative to job satisfaction, motivation and employment longevity. There was relatively little discussion of extrinsic factors such as compensation or benefits such as the retirement plan. However, two chief school business officials mentioned the proximity to their home as important to their employment longevity which could be considered an extrinsic factor. Chief school business officials with employment longevity interviewed for this research study experienced both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation relative to their employment longevity.

### **Profile of a Chief School Business Official with Employment Longevity**

Based on information gleaned in this research study, the profile of a chief school business official with employment longevity in Pennsylvania contains the following characteristics. The chief school business official holds a master's degree, and the average age is 52 with 16 years of service in the current school district. The average student enrollment of the school district is 3,400. The chief school business official is a member of PASBO and is relatively active in the organization. A strong ethical

framework is evident in the character and job performance of the chief school business official. This ethical base facilitates the establishment of relationships with the superintendent and school board which are supportive and therefore critical to employment longevity. The chief school business official can likely survive a negative relationship with one or two school board members through open, honest communication. However, if the superintendent relationship becomes strained the chief school business official is likely to leave the organization. The chief school business official is structurally plateaued. However, this is mitigated through the nature of the work of the chief school business official which requires continued professional development and involvement in outside organizations and projects. Further, there is no desire for additional hierarchical advancement to the position of superintendent. The chief school business official values autonomy in his/her work and appreciates a variety of tasks to accomplish each day which leads to a feeling of being challenged in the position. This challenge mitigates a content plateau to enable employment longevity. The chief school business official likes the job and is content with the current school district which means he/she is personally plateaued.

### **Recommendations**

As a conclusion to this research study, recommendations are offered for chief school business officials, professional education providers and future researchers.

#### **Recommendations for Chief School Business Officials**

It is important for chief school business officials to find appropriate mentors in the field of school business leadership. Participants in this research study identified the value of mentors early in their careers in order to develop the skills necessary to perform

the job effectively. Participants also mentioned the value of mentors throughout their careers for advice as new issues arose as well as someone to consult with on challenging technical or leadership issues.

Chief school business officials should become members of PASBO and be active in the organization. Participants gave strong praise to this professional association for their professional education programs and networking opportunities. PASBO is a valuable partner for chief school business officials who want to excel in their jobs and have a long career in this profession.

Chief school business officials need to be aware of the problems a career plateau can cause and need to understand that they will likely be structurally plateaued upon employment. However, the significant challenges associated with the position should overcome the effects of a content plateau. In order to mitigate the effects of a career plateau, professional development, further education and involvement in outside professional or community organizations will be necessary.

### **Recommendations for Professional Education Providers**

The ASBO Professional Standards are reliable indicators of the skills necessary for success in the position of chief school business official. In particular the ethical standards and leadership competencies were determined to be critical for employment longevity. Therefore professional education providers should tailor programs around these standards and competencies. Specific program recommendations include leadership, negotiations, conflict resolution, school board/community relations, school law and communication. This recommendation is targeted to both professional

development programs and college programs aimed at preparing school business officials.

Relationships with superintendents and school boards are critical to the success and employment longevity of the chief school business official. Professional education programs should be developed to address these vital relationships. Chief school business officials cited this issue as the one likely to make them consider leaving the organization. In summary, more professional education programs are needed in the areas of ethics for school business officials, the chief school business official/superintendent relationship, and the chief school business official/school board relationship.

### **Recommendations for Future Researchers**

It is possible that the attributes identified in this research study as contributing to employment longevity of chief school business officials are attributes that are prevalent across the profession regardless of years of service. Therefore, additional research is recommended in this area. It would also be instructive to compare the attributes of chief school business officials with employment longevity to attributes that might be identified in chief school business officials who change school districts often.

A somewhat unanticipated finding in this study was the very high importance of ethics in the work of the chief school business official and in employment longevity. In particular, the results of this study indicate a connection between ethical leadership and employment longevity. More specific research relative to Hartman and Stefkovich (2004) ethical frameworks, Jacoby (2004) ethical quality of leaders, ethical leadership and employment longevity, and the ASBO Ethical Standards is recommended.

Career plateauing can occur in any position and mitigating the effects of a career plateau is necessary for success and longevity in employment. It is likely that career plateaus occur in other positions in public education such as principal, assistant principal, assistant superintendent or superintendent. Therefore, additional research is recommended in this area.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher identified many comments related to altruism and the chief school business official's role in promoting and bringing value to the organization. In particular, one question asked what things the participant would change about their work. Most of the responses were related to items that would benefit the school district, not the chief school business official. Examples included more funding for the school district, more time to focus on projects that would benefit the school district, and the elimination of mandates that place financial and operational burdens on the school district. Further, chief school business officials were very aware that their jobs are to ensure that educational programs for students can be funded. Therefore, further research on altruism and the chief school business official is recommended.

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**Appendix A**  
**Association of School Business Officials International**  
**Professional Standards and Code of Ethics**

**Leadership Competencies:**

**THE EDUCATIONAL ENTERPRISE**

**Organization And Administration**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Identify and apply various organizational leadership models
- Identify techniques for motivating others, delegating authority, decision making, information processing, planning, and allocating resources
- Examine methods of assigning personnel and resources to accomplish specific goals and objectives and to utilize scheduling techniques for the coordination of tasks to maximize personnel and resource utilization
- Identify problems, secure relevant information, and recognize possible causes of conflict
- Utilize questioning techniques, fact-finding, categorizing information, and retention of relevant data
- Apply concepts of change, group dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and effective problem solving
- Delegate and assign responsibilities to staff; collect, analyze, and evaluate information to generate contingency plans; and apply basic concepts of organizational development
- Maintain a positive working relationship with all staff

**Public Policy And Intergovernmental Relations**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Develop and apply the policies and roles of all relevant education authorities and local and national governments
- Identify the role of special interest groups (public and private) within a school district and their ability to influence those who approve district policy
- Analyze the political and legislative process as it relates to local board elections, municipal governments, state/provincial legislatures, and other governmental jurisdictions
- Use the skills necessary to interpret and evaluate local school board policies and administrative procedures to ensure consistent application in the daily operation of the school district.

**Legal Issues**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Identify the local and national constitutional rights that apply to individuals within the public and private education system
- Review and analyze appropriate statutory and constitutional authority regarding the administration of public and private schools

- Review and analyze significant statutory and case law relative to financial resource management, human resource management, facility management, property management acquisition, information management including freedom of information and protection of privacy, and management of ancillary services
- Apply the highest values and ethical standards as they relate to the entire profession of school business administration
- Protect all stakeholders' interests with respect to responsibility and financial integrity

### **Technical Competencies:**

#### **FINANCIAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

##### **Principles Of School Finance**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Apply economic and financial markets/theories
- Recognize and forecast the major sources of revenue available to the school district from local and national governments and other sources
- Interpret the relevant governmental funding model
- Analyze the impact of shifts in local and national funding and the effect on local spending plans
- Apply multiple techniques for identifying expenditures across cost centers and programs
- Explore alternative and innovative revenue sources
- Recognize and analyze significant social, demographic, and economic changes that may impact the financial plan of the district.

##### **Budgeting And Financial Planning**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Prepare a budget calendar to meet the time constraints of budget preparation
- Use multiple approaches to determine reliable enrollment and personnel projections
- Forecast anticipated expenditures by program
- Identify various methods of budget analysis and management
- Apply statistical process control techniques for budgetary analysis
- Apply the legal requirements for budget adoption
- Prepare revenue projections and estimates of expenditures for school sites and district-wide budgets
- Recognize and explain internal and external influences on the budget
- Maximize state/provincial/national aids for the district
- Communicate the relationship between programs, revenues, and appropriations of the school district to the stakeholders
- Develop multi-year budgets that serve as a communications tool for the stakeholders
- Develop a financial model to monitor a school district's financial health
- Analyze comparable data of other school districts.

### **Accounting, Auditing, And Financial Reporting**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Obtain the services of an internal and external auditor
- Establish and verify compliance with finance-related legal and contractual provisions
- Communicate the relationship between programs, revenues, and appropriations of the school district to the stakeholders
- Prepare, analyze, and report financial statements and supporting discussion documents to the board of education throughout the fiscal year
- Prepare a corrective action plan from the information conveyed in the annual audit report to improve financial tracking and reporting and internal controls and guide the implementation of the plan
- Apply concepts and standards of accounting relevant to the district's location
- Adhere to the accounting standards-setting governing body and prepare financial statements in accordance with the most current standards as issued by such body
- Report the financial status of the district to the appropriate state/provincial agency in the appropriate regulatory format, which may be on a generally accepted accounting basis or on a customized/regulated basis of reporting.

### **Cash Management, Investments, And Debt Management**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Select professional advisors/contractors such as bond counsel, rating agencies, financial advisors, and underwriters
- Use lease purchasing and partner with other jurisdictions such as municipalities, counties, and other school districts
- Develop/recommend investment policies for the governing board to include investment objectives such as maximizing investment income and preserving the investment principal
- Develop specifications for the selection of banking and other financial services
- Apply the concept of compensating balances
- Comprehend procedures and legal constraints for cash collection and disbursement
- Calculate the yields and understand the risks of various investment options legally available to a school district
- Apply various methods of cash forecasting
- Apply appropriate types of short-term debt financing instruments available to school districts
- Analyze monthly internal transfers and loans
- Analyze the legal constraints and methods of issuing long-term general obligation bonds, including the bond rating process and the role of the bonding attorney and rating services
- Analyze the implication of arbitrage rules that may apply to the issuance of long-term general obligation bonds; provide for arbitrage payable when appropriate

- Prepare a cash flow analysis, including a fund balance report, for the board of education
- Review accrued receivables and understand permitted collection processes.

### **Technology For School Finance Operations**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Keep current with technology applications and programs
- Assess the district's needs related to available budget dollars for technology
- Ensure that the district technology plan is designed to meet the district's goals
- Develop an operational plan to meet the district's financial goals and objectives.

## **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

### **Personnel And Benefits Administration**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Coordinate the development and management of an appropriate personnel database to provide seamless integration with payroll and other school district functions
- Manage and continually evaluate the effectiveness of the school district's payroll operations
- Administer employment agreements including interpreting contract language, considering the concepts of "past practice," "just cause" provisions, and grievance procedures
- Assist with the processes related to the recruitment, selection, orientation, assignment, evaluation, and termination of school district personnel
- Ensure the selection and hiring of the most qualified individuals for positions, adhering to all local and national rules and regulations
- Research and explain various compensation arrangements including salaries and wages, employee health care benefit programs, and retirement options
- Coordinate the procedures for termination of employment including the concept of "due process" and an awareness of the procedures, usually governed by collective bargaining agreements, with respect to reduction in work force.

### **Professional Development**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Conduct needs assessments to identify areas and content for training and development
- Build a professional development system, based primarily on adult motivation research, to improve the performance of staff members and to assist staff in meeting the educational objectives of the school district
- Ensure all staff meet training and continued education requirements to comply with local and national rules and regulations
- Identify appropriate procedures for the management and evaluation of professional development programs

- Involve all school district staff in determining their professional development needs that can significantly enhance the effectiveness of employee training and development programs.

### **Labor Relations And Employment Agreements**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Analyze jurisdictional and governmental laws and regulations with respect to employment agreements
- Continually conduct and analyze benchmark surveys to assess the cost of current salary and employee benefit packages and proposals
- Analyze current employment contracts and/or collective bargaining agreements and develop comparative reports with local and national agreements
- Identify and monitor compliance with the grievance procedures as set out in employment agreements and local and national law
- Review local and national laws and regulations with respect to impasse procedures such as mediation, voluntary arbitration, and binding arbitration

### **Human Relations**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Diagnose, maintain, and when necessary, improve organizational health/morale, including increasing focus on employee wellness programs
- Develop policies and procedures for the management of school district personnel
- Develop employee assistance programs and evaluate their impact on the school district's staff morale
- Frequently monitor performance through constructive evaluations, including a comparison of standards and goal-setting to ensure accountability
- Identify and implement procedures for conflict resolution and team building to enhance morale and productivity
- Help create a high performance work system by fostering open communication and feedback throughout all levels of the district
- Recognize and promote compliance with standards of ethical behavior and standards for professional conduct applicable to all school district staff
- Stay current with management theory and leadership styles including concepts of behavioral science, organizational structure theory, developing and maintaining organizational culture, and managing organizational change.

## **FACILITY MANAGEMENT**

### **Planning And Construction**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Develop a long-range facility plan that includes demographic data and serve as an integral member of the planning team
- Develop a working knowledge of funding sources and issues related to school construction, including bond ratings, the rating process, and bond election processes

- Develop appropriate procedures for selecting architects, engineers, construction managers, and other professionals
- Apply the steps and procedures involved in developing and using education specifications for selecting school sites
- Review the legal and administrative responsibilities for advertising, awarding, and managing construction contracts
- Recognize the impact of energy and environmental factors on the learning process
- Meet the requirements of local and national agencies regarding construction and renovation of school facilities
- Communicate financial implications of unanticipated issues during the construction process to appropriate personnel in order to guarantee project solvency
- Involve appropriate existing district/agency personnel who have experience with local energy demands, materials choices, and contractor regulations to share their concerns during construction job progress meetings.

### **Maintenance And Operations**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Administer procedures required to keep schools clean, safe, and secure through effective custodial services and preventive maintenance
- Manage energy consumption and environmental aspects
- Determine resource allocation for maintenance and operations
- Develop a crisis management plan
- Maintain a positive working relationship with staff, contractors, and suppliers
- Be knowledgeable of sources of alternative revenue (other than debt or tax levies) such as grant revenue to meet facility needs
- Be able to effectively form partnerships with the private sector to enhance resources available to the district in regard to facilities and equipment
- Utilize technology to improve facilities through data management.

## **PROPERTY ACQUISITION AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Purchasing**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Develop and implement an integrated purchasing process that complies with all government regulations
- Adhere to a strict code of purchasing and procurement ethics
- Develop and implement a bid procurement system that complies with all government regulations
- Analyze and, if feasible, implement an e-procurement system that complies with all government regulations
- Obtain good value for each procurement
- Properly and effectively apply the rules, regulations, and statutes that govern school procurement

- Determine and produce the most appropriate method of source selection for each procurement
- Formulate competitive procurement solicitations that are fair and reasonable and that promote open competition
- Conduct all procurement without conflict of interest, impropriety, or any attempt to obtain personal gain.

### **Supply And Fixed Asset Management**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Develop and implement a system to manage and track supply inventories and distribution
- Develop and implement a program for the effective current and long-range acquisition, maintenance, and repair of equipment
- Develop a system to reallocate and/or dispose of surplus, scrap, and obsolete materials and equipment
- Develop and implement a system for the proper valuation, classification, and depreciation of fixed assets
- Develop and implement a system to adequately control and account for capital assets.

### **Real Estate Management**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Coordinate with other government agencies regarding zoning, land use, and other real estate issues
- Develop and implement procedures for the acquisition and disposal of land and buildings
- Develop and implement a use of facility system that complies with all government regulations.

## **INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

### **Strategic Planning**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Participate in administrative and employee teams in the identification of short- and long-term goals in all aspects of school district activities
- Assist with the development and communication of a vision of the preferred future of the school district, drawing from current research and best practice
- Assist in the development of a strategic plan that will move the district toward the achievement of its mission and goals
- Assist in providing the data required to facilitate the strategic planning process
- Assist in the implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting, and revision of a strategic plan.

### **Instructional Support Program Evaluation**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Apply a practical and research-based knowledge of the components and skills to evaluate programs and business services
- Identify various economic and cost factors inherent in program operation and evaluation
- Develop and apply procedures for the systematic evaluation of instructional support programs
- Analyze, develop, and apply various methods of measuring instructional goals and program effectiveness
- Effectively manage a change process when evaluation determines that instructional support programs must be improved.

### **Instructional Program Evaluation**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Support the components of the instructional programs within the school district
- Participate in the planning and implementation of instructional program improvement
- Analyze the various economic factors associated with the delivery and evaluation of instructional programs
- Develop procedures for the evaluation and reporting of the cost effectiveness of instructional programs
- Utilize evaluation data toward the development of instructional program changes
- Effectively participate in the change process when instructional programs must be improved
- Assist in directing and facilitating the allocation of resources within the school district toward the improvement of instructional programs
- Assist in directing and promoting the allocation of resources for professional development leading to improved instructional programs.

### **Communications**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Comprehend effective communication strategies and techniques related to mass and interactive communications
- Identify the primary components of public information management and public relations
- Develop a clear understanding of the major constituencies within the school district
- Present financial data to various school and community groups in written, oral, and multi-media formats
- Assist in the development of a plan for a positive school community relations program for the business office and the school district
- Assist in the development of procedures for the management of public information programs and departments that relate to school-community relations.

## **Management Information Systems**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Direct or develop management information systems
- Apply the most current technology to the storage, analysis, and communication of data (fax, electronic mail, administrative and educational computer systems, etc.)
- Evaluate the cost benefits and organizational value of producing information
- Develop, maintain, and validate a records management system using appropriate technology that complies with all legal requirements
- Develop and maintain an accurate database to facilitate management decisions using current information management techniques
- Administrate a computerized management information system
- Ensure that appropriate data security and privacy of records are maintained
- Assist in the integration and gathering of information for public relations purposes
- Assist in and coordinate the gathering and reporting of information for government reports
- Maintain and protect the historical records archive of the school district
- Assist in the development and implementation of technology in the business office and the classroom environment
- Maintain a working knowledge of the technology and software available for school and business office use
- Direct or develop specific plans for secure student and employee access to the Internet
- Evaluate the cost of Internet access options for the school district
- Evaluate and apply various technology tools for use in the school and business office
- Assist in the development of long-range technology planning for the school district
- Promote and assist in the development of technology training for all staff
- Allocate appropriate resources toward the purchase and installation of technology and technology infrastructures in the business office, the school office, and the classroom
- Develop appropriate specifications for purchasing technology and contracting for technology infrastructure for the school district.

## **ANCILLARY SERVICES**

### **Risk Management**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Ensure that a comprehensive risk management program is in place
- Ensure the risk management program addresses safety and security
- Assess risk management programs and recommend changes consistent with district needs
- Identify and apply models for the evaluation of potential risk management programs
- Identify and evaluate alternative methods of funding and managing risk

- Communicate the risk management program to all stakeholders
- Direct the process of selecting/employing an insurance consultant or risk manager
- Adhere to legal requirements for insurance coverage.

### **Transportation**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Support and maintain a student transportation program that adheres to all legal requirements
- Ensure (where appropriate) that the school bus maintenance and replacement program is established and maintained
- Monitor the student transportation program for its safety, security, and efficiency and make adjustments as needed
- Analyze alternative methods available for providing transportation
- Ensure (where appropriate) an efficient and comprehensive routing system is developed and maintained
- Ensure a comprehensive plan is in place that includes an analysis of what transportation requirements are and the basic features of a system to provide pupil transportation, and where appropriate, arrangements for screening, training, re-training and retaining bus drivers, paraprofessionals, and other essential transportation personnel
- Develop and maintain open and clear lines of communication with parents, staff, administration, state/provincial legislatures, and the public for the purpose of conveying the responsibilities, needs, and expectations of all stakeholders.

### **Food Service**

The school business official understands and demonstrates the ability to:

- Establish procedures for the implementation and operation of the food service program
- Adhere to the legal requirements, including local and national government guidelines of the food service program
- Monitor the food service program and make adjustments as needed
- Ensure the management systems for tracking meals and inventories are in place and identify participant status
- Manage and control inventories and procurement
- Ensure compliance with required nutritional value is in place
- Analyze the methods available for providing food service and identify and recommend the most beneficial methods for a given situation
- Interface with nutrition and regulatory agencies relative to planning, conduct, and reporting of catering service programs within the school
- Ensure effective cash handling procedures and internal controls.

## **Ethical Competencies:**

### **CODE OF ETHICS**

#### **Ethical Standards**

In all activities, the school business official shall:

- Make the well-being of all students, staff, and fellow members a fundamental value in all decision making and actions
- Fulfill professional responsibilities with honesty and integrity
- Support the principle of due process and protect the civil and human rights of all individuals
- Obey all local, state, and national laws
- Implement the policies and administrative rules and regulations of the employing organization (school district, private school and/or associated organization)
- Pursue appropriate measures to correct those laws, policies, and regulations that are not consistent with this code of ethics
- Not tolerate the failure of others to act in an ethical manner and will pursue appropriate measures to correct such failures
- Never use their positions for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic, or other influence
- Honor all contracts until fulfillment or release.

#### **Ethical Conduct**

In all activities, the school business official shall demonstrate adherence to the ethical standards by:

- Actively supporting the goals and objectives of the educational institution with which they work
- Interpreting the policies and practices of their employer to the staff and to the community fairly and objectively
- Implementing, to the best of their ability, the policies and administrative regulations of their employer
- Assisting fellow members, as appropriate, in fulfilling their obligations
- Supporting a positive image of the educational institution with which they work
- Not publicly criticizing board members, superiors, administrators, or other employees
- Helping subordinates achieve their maximum potential through fair and just treatment
- Maintaining confidentiality of data and information
- Accurately and objectively reporting data, in a timely fashion, to authorized agencies.

#### **Expectations Of Personal And Professional Integrity**

In the conduct of business and the discharge of responsibilities, the school business official will:

- Conduct business honestly, openly, and with integrity

- Avoid conflict of interest situations by not conducting business with a company or firm in which the official or any member of the official's family has a vested interest
- Avoid preferential treatment of one outside interest group, company or individual over another
- Uphold the dignity and decorum of their office in every way
- Never use their position for personal gain
- Never accept or offer illegal payment for services rendered
- Not accept gifts, free services, or anything of value for or because of any act performed or withheld
- Support the actions of colleagues whenever possible
- Actively support appropriate professional associations aimed at improving school business management, and encourage colleagues to do likewise
- Accept leadership roles and responsibilities when appropriate.

Adapted from:

ASBO (2006). *International School Business Management Professional Standards and Code of Ethics*. Reston, VA: Association of School Business Officials International.

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Demographic Information**

The following information will be collected prior to the scheduled interview.

- Name
- Title
- School District
- Age
- Education Level
- Professional Experience (attach an updated resume, if available)
- Involvement in Professional Organizations
- Involvement in Community/Service Organizations

#### **Questions related to the Position**

1. What are the major roles and responsibilities of the chief school business official?
2. Describe an innovative process or project that you designed and implemented to enhance the operation of your school district.
3. Describe a project that you worked on that was outside your direct area of responsibility.
4. Describe your definition of ethics and how ethics relate to your role as chief school business official.
5. Describe the conditions in your organization that promote job satisfaction.
6. Describe the conditions that cause job frustration and limit job satisfaction.
7. What role has being promoted played in your career as a chief school business official?

8. Describe how outstanding performance is recognized in your organization.
9. Describe your position five years from now.
10. If you could change three things about your work, what would they be?

**Questions related to Employment Longevity**

11. Describe the factors that contribute to your employment longevity.
12. Did you, or do you now, have someone you consider to be a mentor? Describe the role of your mentor in your career.
13. What impact have professional organizations had on your longevity as a chief school business official?
14. Describe your relationship with your superintendent(s) over the years. In what ways have they been supportive or challenging?
15. Describe your relationship with your School Board over the years. To what extent have they been supportive or challenging?
16. Describe a major conflict that you faced in your career as a chief school business official. How was it resolved?
17. Do you think you have stayed too long, not long enough, or about the right amount of time as the chief school business official in this district? Please explain.
18. What, if anything, would cause you to consider leaving this position? Have you ever thought about leaving? Why did you leave your last position(s)?
19. Describe the competencies you think have been most important to your longevity as a chief school business official.
20. Is there anything you would like to add?

21. May I contact you for a follow-up interview if further clarification is needed based on patterns that emerge from the information provided?

Several of the interview questions have been adapted with permission from James M. Sebert and William C. Shecket.

## **Appendix C Interview Guide**

### **Demographic Information**

The following information will be collected prior to the scheduled interview.

- Name
- Title
- School District
- Age
- Education Level
- Professional Experience (attach an updated resume, if available)
  - Describe work experience prior to becoming a chief school business official.
  - How many years of experience as a chief school business official do you have?
  - Have they all been in this district or have you held the position in other districts?
- Involvement in Professional Organizations
- Involvement in Community/Service Organizations

### **Questions related to the Position**

1. What are the major roles and responsibilities of the chief school business official?
  - a. Of those that you described, which is the most important?
2. Describe an innovative process or project that you designed and implemented to enhance the operation of your school district.

3. Describe a project that you worked on that was outside your direct area of responsibility.
  - a. Did you find your participation on the project valuable? Please explain.
4. Describe your definition of ethics and how ethics relate to your role as chief school business official.
  - a. Please provide an example of an ethical dilemma you faced in your job.  
How was it resolved?
5. Describe the conditions in your organization that promote job satisfaction.
  - a. What do you like best about your job?
  - b. What aspects of your work are most important to you?
  - c. What importance do you attach to having a variety of tasks or projects?
6. Describe the conditions that cause job frustration and limit job satisfaction.
  - a. What do you like least about your job?
  - b. Do you feel challenged in your work?
7. What role has being promoted played in your career as a chief school business official?
  - a. Do you expect further hierarchical advancement in your career?
8. Describe how outstanding performance is recognized in your organization.
  - a. How do you value getting recognition from others for your work?
9. Describe your position five years from now.
  - a. If retirement, have put a transition plan in place? If not, have you thought about a transition plan?
10. If you could change three things about your work, what would they be?

### **Questions related to Employment Longevity**

11. Describe the factors that contribute to your employment longevity.
12. Did you, or do you now, have someone you consider to be a mentor? Describe the role of your mentor in your career.
13. What impact have professional organizations had on your longevity as a chief school business official?
  - a. Please identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of current training programs offered for the chief school business official?
  - b. Do you plan to obtain more formal education?
  - c. Do you plan to obtain additional professional certification(s)?
14. Describe your relationship with your superintendent(s) over the years. In what ways have they been supportive or challenging?
  - a. Please provide specific examples.
  - b. What strategies did you use to get through the challenging times?
15. Describe your relationship with your School Board over the years. To what extent have they been supportive or challenging?
  - a. Please provide specific examples.
  - b. What strategies did you use to get through the challenging times?
16. Describe a major conflict that you faced in your career as a chief school business official. How was it resolved?
17. Do you think you have stayed too long, not long enough, or about the right amount of time as the chief school business official in this district? Please explain.

18. What, if anything, would cause you to consider leaving this position? Have you ever thought about leaving? Why did you leave your last position(s)?
19. Describe the competencies you think have been most important to your longevity as a chief school business official.
- a. Leadership competencies
  - b. Technical competencies
  - c. Ethical competencies
20. Is there anything you would like to add?
21. May I contact you for a follow-up interview if further clarification is needed based on patterns that emerge from the information provided?