



Washington State University

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Will defend their dissertation on

Date: January 23, 2026

Time: 2:00 P.M.

Zoom: Link by request ceshs.gradstudies@wsu.edu

Faculty, students and the general public are encouraged to attend

Title:

RURAL SUPERINTENDENTS' DECISION MAKING: A MICROPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Chair: Sharon Kruse

Abstract:

This study explores how rural superintendents navigate micropolitical dynamics—power, influence, and community context—in their decision-making. Despite the prevalence of these dynamics in educational leadership, their role in rural superintendents' decisions remains understudied. Existing research on micropolitics and the rural superintendency indicates that interrelated organizational relationships create complex leadership challenges, particularly given the distinct needs of rural school districts.

The research questions guiding this study are:

RQ1: How do rural superintendents describe navigating and balancing competing stakeholder interests in their strategic decision-making?

RQ2: How do rural superintendents report that the rural context influences their decision-making and stakeholder engagement strategies?

RQ3: How do rural superintendents describe the factors that influence their choices between independent and collaborative decision-making?

The sample includes rural superintendents who lack building-level responsibilities (i.e., serving as principal) and do not have assistant superintendent support. All participants serve districts with enrollments between 500 and 1,300 students. Qualitative, phenomenological interviews were used to gather authentic insights into the challenges these leaders face and the strategies they employ to balance competing demands.

Findings support and extend the literature on the rural superintendency and micropolitics. Themes align closely with core micropolitical concepts, the distinctive qualities of rural superintendents, and strategic categories of educational leadership. Across all three research questions, findings reveal consistent overlap among power, interests, and context.

Implications inform practitioners, preparation programs, rural school districts, and aspiring rural superintendents. The study suggests that micropolitics is an inherent reality—not merely an obstacle—and that effective rural superintendents leverage their positional influence and community relationships to make sound decisions.