

A STUDY OF NEW YORK STATE AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPERINTENDENTS:  
THEIR PATHWAYS TO THE SUPERINTENDENCY

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Associate Professor of Educational Leadership Dr. Ann Myers  
Doctoral Research Committee Chair  
School of Education  
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Kimberly Young Wilkins

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## Abstract

The cited research clearly demonstrates that there is a gap in the literature on African American educational leaders. The data indicates that there are few African American superintendents leading districts, not only in New York State, but nationally as well. There have been significant gains in the number of women obtaining this key educational leadership position in the last twenty-five years, but this increase is much less for African Americans. This study was limited to seven African American superintendents who were currently serving as superintendents in New York State. The results of this study reflect only the experiences, views, and perceptions of the seven African American superintendents that participated in this research. Nevertheless, this study contributes to a better understanding of the contexts by which African American superintendents are obtaining their coveted positions. The intent for this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning African American superintendents in this White, male-dominated educational position. The findings of this study revealed that African Americans encountered race and racism, as they sought the position of the superintendency. All of the participating superintendents acknowledged that they had encountered issues of race and racism in the pursuit of the superintendency. However, this study's findings show that the issues of race or racism were experienced differently for each of the participants. What became evident in the findings were their perceptions of and reactions to racism. The findings also revealed that African American superintendents gained access to the superintendency, despite the barriers and challenges they encountered.

Key words: race, racism, African American, superintendent, recruitment, networking, pathways, pipeline, barriers, mentoring, search consultants, Critical Race Theory

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

A superintendent of schools is an individual who has executive oversight and administrative responsibility for a school system. The superintendent position is one of the most influential and demanding educational leadership positions in education today. A superintendent has the responsibility for personnel selection and appointment, preparation of operating budgets, and implementation of school policies and regulations. The school superintendent needs to be knowledgeable and skillful in areas of school finance and investment strategies, school law, school construction, curriculum, technology, teaching/learning styles and methods, team building, and seeing the big picture. This key educational executive position carries the responsibility for the quality of education for millions of our nation's children. Finding the right person for this position is one of the main responsibilities of a district's board of education (BOE) (Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress, & Hadderman, 1989; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Scott, 1980).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The superintendency is a pivotal educational leadership position. Traditionally, regardless of the socio-economics or demographics of a district, this pivotal leader has been a white male (Brown, 2005; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 2000b). Data indicate that African Americans have been, and continue to be, underrepresented in the educational leadership position of superintendent. The United States Census Bureau (2011) reported that in 2000 the superintendency was the most white, male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States. Researchers agree that women and racial minority groups are underrepresented in the superintendency (Atiba-Weza, 2010; Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Kowalski, 1999; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 2003). In particular, Kowalski (1999) wrote

“Both women and members of racial and ethnic minority groups constitute a small portion of the nation’s school superintendents, and, therefore the issue of access is especially significant for them” (p. 26).

According to the Kowalski et al. (2010) there were approximately 14,500 school districts nationally, of which 94% had white superintendents. In NYS since 2000, the number of African American superintendents has slightly increased, while the number of women hired as superintendents has increased substantially from 12% in 1996 to 18.4% (Volp et al., 2004). In 2010, according to the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), African Americans occupied less than 3% of the superintendent positions nationally. In New York State (NYS) in 2011, there were 697 superintendent positions, of which African Americans held 17 (2.4%). In 2010, approximately 15% of the nation’s school-age students were African American, yet as previously stated, less than 3% of the superintendents nationwide were African American (NABSE, 2010). The statistics for NYS were similar, with 19% of the state’s school-age students being African American with less than 3% of the superintendent positions held by African Americans. Why are there so few African American educational leaders in superintendent positions?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not there were perceived factors that precluded African Americans from the superintendency in NYS, excluding New York City (NYC). This study intended to explore the personal perspectives and experiences of NYS’s African American superintendents as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position. It explored the barriers and challenges they encountered in this process. Limited research has been conducted on African Americans in educational leadership positions,

specifically their career pathways to the superintendency (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Tallerico, 2000b). This was a qualitative grounded theory study that investigated the individual hiring experiences and perceptions of current African American superintendents in NYS. This study provides aspiring African American educators with research and recommendations on how experienced African Americans successfully obtained their superintendent positions.

### **Research Questions**

This study focused on NYS African American superintendents' perceptions of pathways necessary for them to obtain superintendent positions. As of 2011, there were currently seventeen African American superintendents leading school districts in NYS. The research questions were:

1. What are the similarities and differences of perception regarding barriers to the superintendency that exist among the African American superintendents?
2. What are the similarities and differences of perception of African American superintendents regarding strategies they utilized to overcome the barriers to the superintendency?
3. What are the similarities and differences of the communities/districts in which the African American superintendents now serve?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the background of the African American superintendents in this study?
5. How do the African American superintendents view race as it pertains to attaining superintendent positions in NYS?

## **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study was obtaining the experiences of the current African American superintendents on their successful pursuits and pathways to the superintendency in NYS. Moody (1973) and Scott (1980) both emphasized the lack of research on African Americans in superintendent positions. Forty years later, there is still limited research regarding African American superintendents and their pathways to the superintendency (Coursen et al., 1989; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). There has been a large focus on women in the superintendency over the past 25 years, yet the research on African Americans in the superintendency lags significantly behind (Tallerico, 2000b; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Another significance of this study was expanding the research on the experiences of African Americans in the superintendency.

## **Overview of Methods**

Qualitative research methodologies have been the overwhelming method of choice among scholars examining race issues in the superintendency, which is the reason a qualitative design was used for this study (Atiba-Weza, 2010; Horsford, 2009; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 2000a). This study was a qualitative grounded study of the barriers and challenges of African Americans as they obtained superintendent positions in NYS. This study used data collected through interviews to examine the experiences of African American superintendents and to gain an understanding of the barriers and challenges they identified as having an impact on their attaining the superintendency. These barriers and challenges were compared to those identified in current research and studies. The number of superintendents interviewed was based on their availability and location, regardless of their gender, age, length of time in the position, or the size of their district. The interview questions

for this qualitative grounded study were designed based on themes currently found in the literature but with the intention of drawing out new themes.

A more detailed description of the methods used in this research on African American superintendents is featured in Chapter III.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to the NYS African Americans who were currently superintendents. During the period in which the study was conducted, the number of African American superintendents in NYS began at nineteen, but reduced to seventeen. Two of the superintendents left their positions. One superintendent resigned to take a position in another state, and the other retired and was relocating to another state. The researcher would have preferred to interview all of the *sitting* African American superintendents, but time and availability became limitations in this process. This study was limited to include only the superintendent of schools and not the deputies, assistants, or associate superintendents. Other limitations to this study included one superintendent's refusal to participate in the study, and the non-responsiveness of the remainder of potential participants.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout this paper, several terms are used frequently and may be abbreviated.

*African Americans*: African Americans are citizens or residents of the United States who have origins in any of the black populations of Africa. In the United States, the term is generally used for Americans with at least partial Sub-Saharan African ancestry. For the purposes of this research, the term Black, a more inclusive term that includes those who are not African American such as Afro-Caribbean, will also be included as African Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

*Critical Race Theory (CRT):* CRT is an academic discipline focused upon the intersection of race, law and power. This theory began in the mid 1970s in the legal realm, as civil rights legislation was eroding. CRT is concerned with the idea of inherent racism in American society, as well as with the continual usage of racial subordination and discrimination in education (Horsford, 2009; Lopez, 2003).

*Mentoring:* Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development. Mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience, *the mentor*, and a person who is perceived to have less, *the protégé* (Coursen, et al., 1989).

*Networking:* Networking is a supportive system of sharing information and services among individuals and groups having a common interest. Networking is making links from people one person knows to people others know, in an organized way, for a specific purpose, while those networking remain committed to doing their part, expecting nothing in return (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003).

*Pipeline:* This term refers to individuals possessing certification for the superintendency; acting and/or applying for superintendent positions; essentially, it refers to those who are in the applicant pool for superintendent positions (Kamler, 2009; Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

*Search Consultant:* A search consultant is a person or corporation that uses the consultative process of recruiting individuals to fill senior executive positions in educational organizations. Search consultants may be obtained by an organization's BOE (Tallerico, 2000b).

*Superintendency*: A professional term used to describe the office and function of the school system leader position.

### **Summary and Organization of the Study**

The cited research clearly demonstrates that there is a gap in the literature on African American educational leaders. Data indicates that there are few African American superintendents leading districts not only in NYS, but nationally as well. There have been significant gains in the number of women obtaining this key educational leadership position in the last twenty-five years, but this increase is much less for African Americans. In the 21st century, this phenomenon in the lack of gains for African Americans makes it vitally important to research those African American superintendents that have been successful in obtaining this pivotal educational position. Studies such as this become crucial to future African American educators that will strive to ascend to the superintendent position.

This study consists of five chapters: introduction; literature review; methods; findings; and summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Chapter I contains an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, overview of the methodology, research questions, limitations of the study, and definitions and significance of the study. Chapter II contains a review of the literature that is pertinent to the purpose of this study. Chapter III describes the methods used in this study: the design, how this study was conducted, the sources used, and how the data was analyzed. Chapter IV contains the results of the study, and Chapter V summarizes the findings and provides conclusions and recommendations for future research and study.



## Chapter II: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature and research related to African American educators and their attainment of the superintendency. The following topics are specifically examined in this chapter: historical perspective; the impact of *Brown v. Board* (1954); educational leadership; the superintendency and race; recruitment; networking; the pipeline, and Critical Race Theory (CRT).

The position of the superintendent is often portrayed as one of the toughest jobs in the nation (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). Finding qualified candidates to fill these positions has been a source of much concern for districts, as they seek to fill this pivotal role. Choosing a chief executive is a Board of Education (BOE) action, and it has far-reaching consequences. Therefore, finding the right person for this job is the most demanding of any of the BOE's duties (Coursen et al., 1989; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Moody, 1973).

The superintendents of the 21st century face many challenges and must possess a wide variety of skills to manage and lead in an increasingly pluralistic society (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Nationally, the population's demographics have shifted and changed, but this change has not been evident in educational leadership. With the historic U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board* (1954), as well as the civil rights movement of the sixties, the perception would have been that of a significant increase of African Americans in educational administration (Coursen et al., 1989). Coursen et al. wrote,

This analysis is attractive because it is both plausible and optimistic. It implies that the situation is under control and that desirable changes are taking place. Since *Brown*, the number of black administrators has declined dramatically. This is most true of the decision-making positions, where the real power is in the hands of white males. (p. 96)

## Historical Perspective

“Education is a form of social policy – a means by which the society distributes power and privilege” (Scott, 1980, p. 12).

The Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board* (1954), struck down the *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896) doctrine of *separate but equal*. The hope was that our schools, if nothing else in our country, would achieve the goal of the *Brown v. Board* decision of ending the legalized racial segregation in our nation’s public schools. Many African American parents hoped that this ruling would afford their children equal access to funding, facilities, and other resources that had always been available to White children. However, the goal of desegregation for the nation’s public schools was greeted with mixed opinions. There were many in the African American community who saw this as a way to have freedom of school choice for their child, while others in the community viewed this as a way to garner the same educational opportunities as White schools. In many White communities, the decision was met with resistance and hostility. In fact, many school boards, as well as local and state governments, found ways to continue *de-facto* segregation in their communities (Horsford, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Scott, 1980).

The effect of the *Brown v. Board* (1954) decision on education in the 50 years for African Americans is an issue of debate. Although the intended outcomes of the decision were noble and just, the reality was costly to the very community it was supposed to help. White scholars and researchers touted the virtues of integration and the diversity that it was supposed to bring to public education (Horsford, 2009; Kozol, 2005; Orfield, Eaton & The Harvard Project on School Desegregation, 1996). African American educators and scholars viewed integration with a very different lens. The battle for equal educational opportunities that many had fought long and hard

to achieve had a cost that was unexpected for the African American community (Bell, 2004; Horsford, 2009; Jones, 1986; Tillman, 2004). Bell (2004) recalled an elderly Black woman's statement about desegregation. She stated, "We got what we fought for, but we lost what we had" (Bell, 2004, p. 125). Over a half-century later, African American communities have many unfulfilled expectations and hopes. They thought integration would bring solutions to their schools, yet now watch re-segregation take a hold and develop in American schools.

Unfortunately, in the south, progress toward integration was slow and tedious. Moody (1973) reported that overnight change in schools did not happen without many protests and demonstrations, often resulting in violence. There were many all Black school systems throughout the south, comprised entirely of Black students, teachers, administrators, and superintendents. As the dual school system began to come undone, many of the African American educators were displaced. As Coursen et al. (1989) stated, "Blacks supervising other blacks may have been acceptable in the South, but the possibility of black officials giving orders to white teachers and overseeing the education of white students was virtually unthinkable" (p. 96).

The landmark *Brown v. Board* (1954) ruling had declared segregation unconstitutional and changed the complexion of education with a massive unexpected impact on educational leadership for African Americans. The number of African American educators diminished throughout the south during the 1960s by over 80%. African American educators in the south were not only losing teaching positions, but African American principals and superintendents were the first to lose their jobs as desegregation moved slowly forward (Moody, 1973). As African American educational leaders began to disappear, so did the teachers, who had been traditionally hired by these leaders (Moody, 1973). Patterson (2001) reported that "[In] one

southeastern state, the number of African American principals dropped exponentially between the years of 1963-1973 by 99% from 209 to 3” (p. 172). Throughout the south, the number of African American principals dropped over 80% between 1963 and 1970 (Brown, 2005). Brown (2005) continued by stating the following:

African American principals in segregated schools were the ones in greater jeopardy of losing their positions during integration. In the 3-year period from 1967-1970 the number of Black principals in North Carolina diminished by 75% from 670-170, in Alabama by 84% from 250 to 40, and in Louisiana from 1966 to 1971 the number of Black principals declined by 29% from 512 to 363. (p. 586)

The number of African American principals reduced drastically in the south. This became an unexpected casualty of the *Brown v. Board (1954)* decision. This fact did not change the number of African Americans available for the superintendency, but it did change the number of opportunities for African American educational leaders to be superintendents. McCray, Wright, and Beachum (2007) found that the *Brown v. Board* decision demonstrated that:

...the permanence of racism is rather evident in the placement of African American principals immediately after the Brown decision by virtue of the sheer number or reductions of Black principals juxtaposed with the feeling of superiority by many southern Whites toward African Americans before, during, and after the decision of Brown. Today, this permanence of racism could also possibly be reflected in the lingering practice on reference to where African American and White administrators are hired and placed. (p. 5)

Moody quoted from a sitting superintendent in 1970 that the "...most difficult thing about being a Black superintendent is not being Black, it's getting the job in the first place" (1973, p. 4). At a conference in 1970, Black superintendents clearly voiced "...white racism perpetuates the theory of Black inferiority, which makes it difficult for others, Blacks and whites, to conceptualize the Black man in a position of power" (Moody, 1973, p. 23).

In the north, de-facto segregation had been the *law* of the land for public education. Moody (1973) explained with the following, "In the South this was achieved through legal segregation while in the North de-facto segregation and extra legal means were used to *keep Blacks in their place*" (p. 1). In most northern urban cities, the examples of extralegal means were demonstrated by the use of residential/housing patterns, changes in demographics, real estate restrictions, and discrimination that established school attendance patterns resulting in the creation of many predominantly African American schools. However, one of the outgrowths in the north was the increasing demand for African American educators by the African American community. African Americans in these communities were demanding control of their schools and were consciously making requests of who would be running their districts and schools. Scott (1980) explained that "The rise of the urban crisis and the glaring deficiencies of urban schools have illustrated that the problems of society are the problems of the school" (p. 10). As African Americans gained access to representation on school boards, they became more vocal on school matters, emphasizing and demanding the hiring of African American educational leaders.

### **Educational Leadership**

"...the most difficult thing about being a Black superintendent is not being Black...it's getting the job in the first place" (Moody, 1973, p. 4).

At the 1970 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conference, a White superintendent spoke about the lack of African American administrators (Scott, 1980). He clearly blamed the shortage of African American administrators on public school superintendents, college professors, college administrators, school board members, and on the predominantly White, middle-class power structure in communities (Coursen et al., 1989; Scott, 1980). The seventies did see an increase of African Americans in the higher echelon of educational leadership, such as the superintendency. Traditionally, the superintendency was a White, male-dominated arena, with over 99% of the superintendent positions in 1970 being held by white men (Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 2000b).

Moody (1973) wrote the first extensive research paper on Black superintendents. He identified that out of 20,000 school districts at the time, 21 were headed by African American superintendents. Of those 21 superintendents, seventeen were regularly appointed superintendents, and four were acting superintendents (Moody, 1973, p. 13). There were African Americans that had served in superintendencies prior to 1970, but it was nearly impossible to find any pertinent data or information of their existence (Coursen et al., 1989; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 1999). In 1971, those 21 superintendents represented eight states: Alabama, California, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Washington, D.C. Each of the districts led by those African American superintendents was identified as a minority, African American, district and served a community where more than half of the residents were African American (Moody, 1973, p. 54).

When Scott (1980) wrote the second in-depth study on African American superintendents, not much had changed for the African American superintendent. When he

began his research, there were 44 African American superintendents nationwide. In all but two of those 44 districts, African American students were the overwhelming majority of the school district population (Scott, 1980, p. 45). African American superintendents were primarily selected to lead districts where the minority student demographics, as well as the communities, were chiefly African American in population. This became the common belief; African Americans were viewed as only being capable of supervising African American districts (Coursen et al., 1989; Horsford, 2009; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 1999). Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) acknowledged that it was assumed that African American candidates would want to lead districts that were in predominantly African American communities and that school boards would want to match administrator ethnicity with the students' ethnicity (p. 4). They clarified that it became a problem if African American administrators were viewed as only qualified to lead districts of color. Scott's (1977) study explained "rarely is the Black school administrator permitted by Whites or Blacks to function as an educational leader whose race is incidental to his expertise and performance" (p. 437). Horsford (2009) reiterated that for the African American superintendent, race becomes central to their roles as educational experts and leaders in the field. On the other side of the coin, White educational leaders are not limited by race and have greater access to all districts.

### **The Superintendency and Race**

White males have always dominated the superintendent position. According to Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000), on a national level, American superintendents were White, male, and middle-aged, with 95% being White and 86% being male. In 2010, the percentage of superintendents who are White (94%) had not changed with any significance in ten years, according to the Kowalski et al. (2011). For the last forty years, racial minorities and women

have been grossly underrepresented in public school leadership positions on a national level (Glass et al., 2000; Jones & Montenegro, 1982). Scott (1980) stated the following:

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the nation's largest and most influential organization of superintendents and other upper-echelon school administrators, does not collect or disseminate the names or locations of black superintendents. The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), is the only organization with a list of black superintendents. (p. 41)

Unfortunately, this continues to be the state of obtaining data on African American superintendents. Jackson and Shakeshaft reported that it was difficult to obtain data regarding changes in representation by race or ethnic group because of annual statistics not being available and "intersectionality of race/ethnic group and sex is rarely reported" (2003, p. 3).

There are significant numbers of women and racial minorities in other levels of education, but few reach the policy-making levels of educational leadership such as the superintendency. Scott (1980) reported that in 1974, women held 86 superintendencies (0.5%), while Blacks constituted 44 superintendent positions, representing .25%. Those numbers have changed substantially for women superintendents, but not for African American superintendents. Kowalski et al. (2011) reported that in 2010, women represented 24% of superintendent positions nationally, up from 13% in 2000, while NABSE's (2010) data showed the number of African American superintendents during the same time period remained stagnant at approximately 3.4%.

African American candidates are not pursued, recruited, or promoted as vigorously as are White candidates (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). Statistical data show that less than 4% of superintendents nationally are African American, yet there are African Americans that have



successfully attained superintendent positions throughout the nation, as well as in NYS. Sharp et al. (2004) reported that structural and systemic barriers work against the advancement of all superintendent candidates who are not White males (p. 23).

Several well-known studies, such as those by Moody (1973) and Scott (1980), were the first pioneering research to concentrate on African American superintendents. What became clear in those studies were the extreme challenges and dilemmas that confront African American educators as they aspire to become superintendents and educational leaders. Moody reported that when African Americans were hired as superintendents, they were in large urban, high poverty, and troubled districts. Scott described the expansion of Black superintendents as the following:

...the ranks of black superintendents will be related to whites not wanting to deal with the engrossing problems of cities. Black superintendents will inherit the effects of increased societal deterioration, unabated decline in academic achievement, deficient financial resources, higher percentages of black students and students from low-income families, a black majority or activist blacks on the school board, large numbers of blacks in the community, and demands from vocal blacks in the community. (p. 188)

Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003), Scott (1980) and Coursen et al. (1989) stated that districts that hired African American superintendents were usually beset with social and economic issues that severely interfered with the districts' ability to provide an adequate, let alone quality, education. Jackson and Shakeshaft stated the following:

Such districts – no matter what the race of the students and staff – require someone with superhuman skills to bring about sustained school improvement. Nevertheless, nearly a quarter of a century after Scott's observations, it is still these “no win” opportunities that

are primarily available for qualified and highly credential African American superintendents. (p. 3)

Their White counterparts had more opportunities for superintendent positions because they were considered for all types of school districts (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). Scott predicted that the number of African American superintendents would increase, but that this increase would occur in cities that White superintendents would not want to lead.

The demographics of race within the superintendency for NYS were similar to the national data. According to a study by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) in 2000, women made up 18.4% of the approximately 697 superintendents (Volp et al., 2004). In that same year, African Americans accounted for approximately 2% of all superintendents in NYS. In 2009, according to another NYSCOSS study, women accounted for 30% of the superintendents, increasing their numbers by over 12%, whereas in 2009, African Americans still accounted for just over 2% of the superintendents in NYS, with no perceivable increase since 2000 (Fale et al., 2009).

The following sections will review the literature in four areas as it relates to the pathways for African Americans to the superintendency. The areas to be highlighted are the trends of recruitment, networking, the *pipeline*, and the Critical Race Theory as it pertains to the attainment of the superintendency by African Americans.

**Recruitment.** Educational leaders are recruited for the superintendency in a number of traditional ways, such as search consultants, networking, sponsorship, and word of mouth. Tallerico (2000a) indicated that in NYS, there were three basic types of search consultants: private firms, individuals, and regional District Superintendents of Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). The major role of a search consultant in the selection process of

a superintendent search is to assure the integrity of the selection process, and in the course of that process, enhance the dignity, reputation, and image of the BOE (Johnson, 1982).

Nationally, since the early seventies, there has been a marked increase in the use of search consultants to assist BOEs in the selection of school superintendents. Moody (1973) reported this trend based on his 1971 research, noting the increase in school boards retaining consultants to help them with the job of recruiting superintendents. These search consultants were usually associated with:

... colleges and universities, the consultants are educators who have extensive knowledge of the field of public school administration and also have the widespread professional associations which enable them to quickly and easily obtain a substantial number of suitable candidates and to assess their abilities” (Moody, 1973, p. 7).

According to Tallerico (2000b), search consultants were used in approximately 95% of all searches in NYS. Tallerico also reported on how the search committees, university professors, and regional superintendents wielded extraordinary amounts of influence in the search and final selections of superintendents. As districts hire search consultants to find qualified candidates for coveted superintendent positions, a trend becomes apparent. Districts and search consultants tend to protect their own interests, and do not open the field to minority candidates (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). Kamler stated:

Although all the consultants indicated their resistance to presenting a field of candidates without diversity as well as their direct discussions with the boards about acceptance of candidates from different geographical areas, in the end the slate of candidates fairly resembled these prototypes, with the distinction of more women candidates than a decade before. (2009, p. 140)

Search consultants are obligated to bring forth a slate of candidates to the BOE that represent the community and will not jeopardize their future employment opportunities (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). In too many studies, search consultants were constantly using the lack of qualified minority candidates as a reason for their underrepresentation as finalists. African American candidates were discouraged from applying to predominantly nonminority districts. Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) dispelled the notion that well-intentioned school boards and search consultants could not locate enough qualified candidates among underrepresented groups, citing evidence that "...women and minority candidates are certified in much larger numbers than they are chosen for administrative positions" (p. 100). Tallerico (2000b) stated that search consultants equated the "idea of acting affirmatively" (p. 34) toward women and minority candidates as giving them an unfair advantage in the search and selection process, which would mean promoting nonqualified candidates.

Search consultants can be called the *gatekeepers* of the superintendent selection process. Tallerico explained that the gatekeepers ultimately have control of the channels or gates that an applicant will move through based on the decisions they control (2000b). As gatekeepers, search consultants reflect and reinforce that institution or organization that they represent. Marshall (1993) stated that since White males held over 90% of superintendent positions, they were the gatekeepers to the superintendency. The search consultants/gatekeepers can systematically exclude African Americans from promotions to top-level educational positions, especially if they do not conform to the White male dominant behaviors. According to Shoemaker (1991), the search consultant is the person that best captures the interest of the BOE in the gatekeeping process, and the one that advances and discounts candidates based on the formal and informal criteria set forth by the district.

Newton (2006) found that the predisposition of BOEs and search consultants regarding the qualifications of applicants allowed for the opportunity for bias in recruitment and selection of potential candidates (p. 552). Newton further indicated that the position requirements in many cases were so limited that they overlooked other leadership experiences that were more frequently held by women and minorities. The listed advertised requirements that an applicant must have in order to apply for a superintendent position, in many cases, eliminates candidates who are not White males. There is some understanding of this, since the position of the superintendent for the past century has primarily been held by White males, who "...constructed the meaning associated with the leadership roles... that were developed by men... and the majority of social research examined the male experience" (Enomoto, 2000, p. 378). This has led to the primary qualifications related to the position of the superintendent becoming a set of norms that are generally favored for and associated with White males (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Tillman and Cochran (2000) stated "...until this perspective changes, Black women and other underrepresented populations will continue to have restricted opportunities for advancement into higher level educational administration positions" (p. 52).

Even though there are generic qualifications for the superintendency such as instructional leadership, finance, budget knowledge, and excellent communication, Tallerico (2000b) found that school board members and search consultants relied more on "behind the scenes" (p. 29) definitions of candidates qualities. Prior job titles were of more prominence than an individual's particular leadership skills. The basis of this understanding by the BOE and the search consultants of the *qualifications* was key to who made it through the gatekeeping process. Ortiz (2000) found that search consultants, regional superintendents, and educational consultants "wielded extraordinary influence in the search and appointment of superintendents" (p. 561).

Tallerico (2000a) further explained how minority candidates were excluded with the following:

Moreover, although most consultants actively target and encourage experienced superintendents, assistant superintendents, and high school principals to participate in their searches (groups in which White males predominate nationwide), the idea of acting affirmatively to attract female and minority candidates is equated with affording an unfair advantage in the search and selection process. (p. 13)

It is extremely common for White applicants to be *invited* to apply for a superintendent position. Jackson (2006) found that over 50% of the White respondents "...who applied for a superintendency in a predominantly white school district did so because they received an offer/invitation to apply" (p. 26).

African Americans who make it to the first round of interviews were rarely finalists. Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) found that African Americans reported that they believed that when they were given a first-round interview by a search consultant, it was a *token* appearance. In other words, they used these candidates to look like they were bringing diverse candidates forward, but these candidates did not make the final pool. Tallerico's (2000b) study found it difficult to even find diversity among search consultants, with less than 4% of consultants being African American. Tallerico further expounded that the "majority of headhunters and school boards members are nonminority males...and most of the key sources of recruitment and reference checks valued most highly by headhunters and school boards member are white men" (p. 36).

**Networking.** Another recruitment tool used by those aspiring to the superintendency is networking. For this study, networking is defined as developing and establishing professional

affiliations or relationships with various people and organizations. This can be an opportunity to meet people and make contacts that can aid in obtaining access to unadvertised job openings and career enhancement. Networking is a way to help an aspiring educational leader use their skills and knowledge to be properly positioned for the superintendency.

African Americans overall tend to have a less defined network of colleagues to discuss professional issues and concerns. Hudson (1991) found that at least 61% of all school superintendents learned about positions through their informal contacts made through their networking (p. 37). Word of mouth becomes vastly important with informal professional networking contacts. Lacking informal and formal contacts, as well as organizational processes, the majority of African Americans are left out of the search for many leadership positions.

However, one of the findings of Hudson's (1994) research was that minority school superintendents (70.6%) stated that they had used informal contacts extensively to find and obtain their positions in districts with majority African American student populations and African American school board members (p. 390). Hudson concluded that African Americans were not as likely to be hired in nonminority districts if they did not have the "strong informal professional ties" (p. 391). Coursen et al. stated the need for networking "...by which Blacks can counter the old boy network by creating their own system, designed to help minorities help themselves" (1989, p. 103).

The research has stressed the need for professional networking for African Americans in educational leadership. Moody's (1983) study showed that the majority of African American superintendents had received sponsorship from White male educational leaders, primarily superintendents. These contacts gave those aspiring African American superintendents access to BOEs, professional affiliations, networking, and job opportunities. Moody (1983) advised

African American educators aspiring to a superintendent position to network. He also recommended that African Americans superintendents and other professionals serve as encouragers, sponsors, and advisors to other African Americans.

Research has shown the importance of mentors and sponsors in the socialization and success of aspiring educational administrators (Shakeshaft, 1987). According to Tillman and Cochran, “mentoring has been consistently identified as a crucial factor for success in higher level administrative positions” (2000, p. 52). Hill and Ragland (1995) defined mentoring as the following “...simply stated, mentors guide, train, and support a less skilled or experienced person called a novice, mentee or protégé” (p. 72). In addition, Tillman and Cochran (2000) explained that there are a “number of career benefits of mentoring such as learning the political context of the organization, how to access and move projects through the bureaucracy, budgeting, various survival strategies, and becoming acquainted with key individuals within and outside the organization” (p. 53). However, without mentorship/sponsorship, it is difficult for minority educational leaders to be in line for promotions.

Coursen et al. (1989) explained that when older administrators are looking to select prospective educational leaders, they tend to “replicate” (p. 94) themselves. Tallerico (2000b) and Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) further expounded that if replication becomes the order for replacement, the majority of the older administrators, who are White males, would exclude minority candidates. Jackson and Shakeshaft concluded that White men tend to promote other White men, which is traditional known as the *good old boy* network. This form of networking is a very real form of informal networking that is commonly used to find assumed suitable candidates for superintendent positions. Hudson (1994) explained that both White and African American superintendent candidates used informal networking and contacting in order to attain a



superintendent position, but that African Americans used it at a higher percentage: 70.6% versus that of White men at 52.6%. However, where African Americans were allowed to use this informal networking, it was almost exclusively in minority school districts (Hudson, 1994).

Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) stated:

White educators and school board members are complicit in the reproduction of white privilege in the selection of superintendents. While there is ample evidence that people hire people with similar values and backgrounds, skin color trumps all other characteristics including social class and amount of education. (p. 5)

**The pipeline.** There is a perceived order of positions and certifications as to how a person attains the position of superintendent. This order or succession may be one of the contributing factors to why there are so few minorities in educational leadership positions. Jackson (2006) recalled how often during his research in NYS, White administrators, search consultants, and BOE members commented that they could not find qualified African American candidates in the pipeline for administrative positions (p. 25). Ortiz (2000) described the *pipeline tradition* as:

... a system in which persons move up the ladder of positions in some regular order, ensuring orderly succession. For example, school administration careers usually consist of orderly mobility from classroom teacher to school site administrator, central office official, and finally, the superintendency. This practice results in a hierarchical structure in which advancement occurs without competition. (p. 559)

Glass et al. (2000) conducted a national survey of school superintendents and found that all superintendents followed similar paths into the superintendency but with subtle differences based on race. Nonminority superintendents followed a career path from teacher to principal to superintendent. Minority superintendents followed a career path from teacher to principal to

central office, and *then* to the superintendency.

Tallerico (2000b) connected the gatekeeper concept, mentioned earlier in this document, with that of the pipeline or pathway by explaining that:

The gates are typically open widest for candidates with prior experience as superintendents, assistant superintendents, or high school principals. The gates are more likely to be closed, or opened only partially, to applicants whose experience consists primarily of elementary principalship and other educational administrative roles. (p. 29)

Tallerico's study demonstrated that the most wanted sequence of administrative positions for the superintendency was teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. Many minority administrators were elementary principals or held specialized administrative positions that worked primarily with minority students or populations. Those candidates that held other educational administrative roles were less likely to move through the initial screening process. Grogan (1994) stated that candidates with secondary experiences were judged to be better qualified, and thus, they allowed to progress through the gatekeeping process, which favored non-minority candidates while reducing chances for minority candidates.

Tallerico (2000a) found that search consultants and school boards preferred that candidates for the superintendency have experience in secondary principalship versus elementary. Tallerico stated that "...having successfully filled this very demanding position as a secondary principal is seen by those screening through applicants as a proving ground for the demanding role as a school superintendent" (p. 80). If positions are advertised as having secondary or prior superintendent experience, many minority candidates are taken out of the candidate pool in the first round of the process. Sharp et al. (2004) stated, "...there are structural and systemic barriers that work against the advancement of all candidates who are not white males" (p. 21). Jackson

and Shakeshaft (2003) found that there was a “...*log-jam* in the pipeline. While White candidates can exit the pipeline through jobs in both white and minority districts, the African American candidates are only considered for positions in minority districts” (p. 3).

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT), which originated in the legal field, studies race, racism, and power. It has permeated into other arenas, such as ethnic studies, political science, and education. According to Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT has “emerged from the legal arena to uncover the deep patterns of exclusion and what is taken for granted with respect to race and privilege” (p. 14). Many scholars who studied the issue of race found that racism was still very prevalent throughout our society (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez, 2003). A premise of CRT is that racism is normal and a prevalent component in our society. Lopez (2003) strongly felt that “CRT has not spread significantly into the field of educational leadership, where the discourse on diversity has failed to penetrate the salience of racism in schooling” (p. 68). Yet Horsford (2009) viewed CRT through a theoretical lens, stating “it reveals how race and racism work to maintain hierarchies, allocate resources and distribute power in educational practices, processes and institutions” (p. 175).

There are several tenets of CRT, such as counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004). There are two common areas of thought. One area is that of White supremacy and racial power and how the law interacts with both. The second area is looking at a way to transform the law and racial power, while attempting to achieve racial emancipation and anti-subordination. According to Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009):

CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices and discourses.

Specifically, CRT takes the position that instances of racial bias are not exceptions to regular human behavior but are the norm. (p. 656)

CRT theorists try to make sense of racial policies, problems, and practice, while acknowledging their role in our society and challenging the view of White privilege. McCray et al. (2007) and Ortiz (1982) acknowledged, "...that CRT advocates policies to ensure that individuals who have been historically disenfranchised are given equal access to opportunities, such as opportunities in the field of educational leadership, a field that has been overwhelmingly dominated by white men" (p. 4). Looking at how public education is currently constructed, CRT shows how the tolerated inequities in the culture are continuously sustained against African Americans. A connection can be made in subtle forms, as in the gatekeeping and *good old boy* theories, as well as in the practices of the search consultants and mentoring opportunities for African Americans. Racism is embedded in educational organizations and practices, which deny people of color access to power and privilege. Racism is not always blatant and overt but often exists in subtler forms.

### **Summary**

When examining the recent history of educational leadership and African Americans, especially since the *Brown v. Board* (1954) decision, the number of African American principals and superintendents has dropped significantly. The landmark ruling declared segregation unconstitutional and changed the complexion of education, with a massive unexpected impact on educational leadership.

African Americans educators aspiring to the superintendency were only viable candidates for *urban* districts, which is another name for African American or other minority school districts. By the 1970s, there was an increase in the number of African Americans appointed to

urban school districts. They were usually in districts that had severe problems, such as financial hardship, political discourse, and low academic achievement, making it difficult to provide an adequate education, or in areas where their White counterparts did not want to tackle. Moody's (1973) paper concluded that Black superintendents did not get the districts that could provide them with the time and resources to demonstrate their leadership skills.

There continues to be very little research on this topic of perceived barriers to the superintendency for African Americans. No significant research was available until Moody's (1973) study. Historically, African Americans were underrepresented in this pivotal educational leadership position until the 1980s. Prior to that time, the number of African American superintendents was barely measurable. Today, with the number of districts diminishing nationwide, opportunities for African Americans to obtain a superintendent position appear to have diminished, except in troubled, urban, minority community districts. Moody's research concluded that Black superintendents did not get the districts which could provide them with the time and resources to develop the kinds of immediate and long-range programs and plans that would be relevant and that would have an impact on the school district and the school community (1973, p. 25).

Moody (1973) reported that in 1970, a White superintendent spoke at a conference of the American Association of School Administrators, focusing on the severe shortage of Black school administrators. He blamed the lack of Black administrators by maintaining that there was a shortage of Blacks being hired in the lower echelon administrator's positions, putting the responsibility squarely on public school superintendents, college administrators, college professors, school board members, and the predominantly White, middle-class power structure in communities (1973, p. 3).

In the last forty years, the number of African American superintendents has not increased with any significance nationwide. Moody (1973) reported that there were approximately 20,000 superintendents in the United States, but only 21 were identified as African American. A little over ten years later, Jones and Montenegro (1982) reported that there were 96 African American superintendents out of 16,000 superintendent's positions, which accounts for less than 1%. NABSE (1999) documented in their 1999 directory that there were 249 African American superintendents nationwide, just under 2%. According to a study conducted by NYSCOSS in 2000, African Americans accounted for approximately 2.7% of all superintendents in the state (Volp et al., 2004). These NYS African American superintendents were leading school districts comprised of largely minority students, which followed the pattern seen nationwide. Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) acknowledged the belief that many assumed that African American candidates would want to lead districts that were in predominantly African American communities and that school boards would want to match administrator ethnicity with students' ethnicity (p. 4). They went on to explain that it becomes a problem if African American administrators were mainly qualified to lead districts of color. According to Bell (1992), Whites will allow and promote African Americans when it is to their advantage.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the literature on the historical perspective of educational leadership for African American educators. Also examined were the perceived barriers that influenced the career paths of African American superintendents in NYS, such as the *pipeline*, networking, and the CRT and how those impact the attainment of the superintendency for African American candidates.

Research acknowledges that there is a lack of diversity in the superintendency based on

gender and race, giving some generalities as to why (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003, Moody, 1973, Scott, 1980). Little research has been done, however, on how African American superintendents have successfully attained their positions. It is important to note that the number of African Americans in the superintendency is relatively low in NYS (2.4%), yet there have been successful African American superintendents in NYS that were able to obtain this position. This study explored the personal perspectives and experiences of NYS's African American superintendents. It also explored the barriers and challenges these African American superintendents encountered as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position. This study contributes to the dialogue about race in the position of the superintendent. The superintendent position is the pivotal educational leadership position in any school district and, with that position, comes the influence and power to impact educational processes and policies.

## **Chapter III: Methods**

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not there were perceived factors that precluded African Americans from the superintendency in NYS, excluding New York City (NYC). This study intended to explore the personal perspectives and experiences of NYS's African American superintendents as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position. It explored the barriers and challenges they encountered in this process. Limited research has been conducted on African Americans in educational leadership positions, specifically their career pathways to the superintendency (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Tallerico, 2000b). This was a qualitative grounded theory study that investigated the individual hiring experiences and perceptions of current African American superintendents in NYS. This study provides aspiring African American educators with research and recommendations on how experienced African Americans successfully obtained their superintendent positions.

### **Research Questions**

This study focused on NYS African American superintendents' perceptions of pathways necessary for them to obtain superintendent positions. As of 2011, there were currently seventeen African American superintendents leading school districts in NYS. The research questions were:

1. What are the similarities and differences of perception regarding barriers to the superintendency that exist among the African American superintendents?
2. What are the similarities and differences of perception of African American superintendents regarding strategies they utilized to overcome the barriers to the superintendency?



3. What are the similarities and differences of the communities/districts in which the African American superintendents now serve?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the background of the African American superintendents in this study?
5. How do the African American superintendents view race as it pertains to attaining superintendent positions in NYS?

### **Research Design**

This study was conducted as qualitative grounded research. According to Creswell and Miller (1997), if research utilizes a *how* or *what* type of question, and if it seeks to develop and explain a topic in depth, then qualitative inquiry is the preferred method of research. This approach allows the researcher to focus on a smaller number of participants and obtain more in-depth knowledge about their experiences and perspectives. This researcher chose *grounded theory* as described by Maxwell (2005) because it is inductively developed during a study and in constant interaction with the data obtained. Maxwell further explained that this theory is grounded in actually collected data, in contrast to theory that is developed conceptually and then simply tested against empirical data.

This study was rooted in a constructivist's paradigm or worldview, according to Creswell (2009). This research sought to understand the participants' views of their world and their experiences. Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007) acknowledged that the goal of the constructivist's research is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied. An in-depth interview process, using open-ended questioning, allows the researcher to gather information about participants' experiences, thus allowing the researcher to construct meaning of a situation, both socially and historically, within the cultural norms. The

constructivist paradigm allows the researcher to point out the unique experiences of individual stories. Creswell (2009) stated the following on the social constructivist's worldview:

Researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation and they position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their personal, cultural and historical experiences. The researcher's intent is to make sense (or interpret) the meanings other have about the world. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. (p. 8)

### **Participant Selection**

This study examined the experiences of seven African American superintendents in NYS (excluding NYC). There was no available data from the NYS Education Department (NYSED) listing the African American superintendents. This can be clarified by an explanation of the data-management systems. Within NYS, data concerning school district employees is collected through the Basic Educational Data Systems (BEDS) that is completed annually by all public school employees. The instructions state:

...the racial/ethnic designations used in this section item do not denote scientific definitions of anthropological origins. For the purpose of this report, an employee should be included in the group to which he or she appears to belong, identifies with or is regarded in the community as belonging. (New York Department of Education [NYSED], 2011)

The same instructions require an individual to select a racial or ethnic group. Further instructions require individuals to choose between specifically defined racial groups. The definition for African American is:

A Black or African American (not Hispanic origin) person having origins in any black racial groups of Africa. Hispanic or Latino – a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. (NYSED, 2011)

The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) defines race by self-identification of people according to race or races with which they most openly identify. These categories are sociopolitical constructs and should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature. Furthermore, the race categories include both racial and national-origins groups. The U.S. Census website states:

... that Black or African American is a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as “Black, African American, Negro” or provide written entries such as African American, Afro-American, Kenyan, Nigerian or Haitian.

Both of these definitions use self-identification as the major basis for racial identification. Even though they force respondents into a combined race/ethnic category, for the purpose of this study, the definition of African American will be those superintendents who self-identify as being African American. Seventeen of the 697 NYS superintendents have chosen to identify themselves as African American by inclusion in the network of Black Administrators Association, which is an informal and active association. The participant pool was determined based on the following two factors: self-identification as being African American and current occupation of a superintendent position in NYS (excluding NYC) regardless of gender, age, socio-economic, or cultural ethnicity.

There were seventeen African American superintendents in NYS during the time of this study. The 17 potential participants were recruited for participation via a mailed letter of intent and the Internet (email), followed by several rounds of phone calls and emails contacts (See Appendix A). Seven African American superintendents agreed to participate in this study, which represented 41.1% of the 17 African American superintendents that were in the position at the time of the study. Geographically, those seven African American superintendents represented the regions of upstate, mid-Hudson Valley, and downstate New York. Those seven participants were given an overview of the study, which described the purpose of the research and provided an explanation of the informed consent (See Appendix B). The researcher received verbal and written consent by all participants. Three of the seven interviews were conducted in the participant's district office. The remaining four interviews were conducted via telephone. Each interview lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. The researcher did not find any significant differences between the responses of the face-to-face interviews and the telephone interviews in their dialog or in the amount of information gathered from the participants.

### **Instrumentation**

According to Patton (2002), "There are three basic approaches to collecting qualitative data through open-ended interviews; the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardized open-ended interview" (p. 342). This researcher used the interview guide approach for this study. The interview guide, which consisted of nine general category questions with 21 subcategory questions, allowed for the questions to be listed and used as a guide throughout the course of the interviews (See Appendix C). Patton described that "an interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each

person interviewed” (p. 343). This approach allowed the interviewer to have flexibility in the conversation yet stayed focused on the predetermined subject matter.

Prior to the beginning of this research, a pilot interview was conducted to evaluate the appropriateness and clarity of the interview guide questions. The pilot interview provided the researcher with a sense of the time and procedures necessary to conduct the future interviews. The pilot interview was conducted with a former NYS African American superintendent. This pilot interview experience and suggestions from the interviewee helped inform the researcher in the reliability and validity of the interview guide questions.

### **Data Collection**

The grounded theory method of qualitative data analysis was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to provide a systematic approach to data analysis. Grounded theory allows for the theory to emerge from the data through a process of rigorous analysis. Qualitative data analysis for a grounded theory study consists of identifying, coding, and categorizing. Creswell (2009) explained that these steps “involve generating categories of information (open coding), selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model (axil coding) and then explicating a story from the interconnection of these categories (selective coding)” (p. 184).

This qualitative grounded study produced information about the experiences of and processes undertaken by African American superintendents as they obtained the positions of superintendent, as well as information about the cultural factors that impacted their processes from their perspective. These interviews allowed an opportunity to obtain a wealth of information about the participants and their educational career experiences. The researcher used the interview guide with posed questions, which allowed the freedom to explore and probe each

participant with some flexibility. The objective was to elicit open and honest responses from the participants and, if necessary, to further probe for clarification.

Nine categories of questioning were developed, with several sub-categories designed to draw out more information from participants. The guide minimized the potential of the researcher to use leading questions, which could have curtailed the flow of information. All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Each participant was sent a copy of the transcribed interview to check for authenticity and accuracy.

This researcher protected the participants' privacy by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, which was explained fully to each participant in their Informed Consent Document (See Appendix B). Plans to protect confidentiality and anonymity were made before the study began and were carried through to the end. The process of confidentiality included the storage of the raw data (notes and recordings) in a locked place that was not easily accessible to others. The researcher kept them secured until the study was completed, at which time they were destroyed. Anonymity exists when participants' identities cannot be linked to the actual data or responses. The allocation of pseudonyms was used for each participant to protect their identity. Due to the small pool of participants, the researcher implemented a double pseudonym process. This process was used throughout Chapter IV, where the participants are identified simply as superintendents. Again, in the emergent theme section, the superintendents were given alphabetical identities. Finally, in the research question analysis section, they are simply referred to as superintendents, respondents, or participants. This system was used intentionally to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Another source of data used were the NYS District Report Cards (NYSED, 2011). The demographics found in Chapter IV, of each of the superintendents' districts in NYS, were found in those Report Cards.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using content analysis, in which the text of the interview transcriptions were analyzed and from which patterns or themes emerged. This involved using both inductive and deductive processes. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained, "At the heart of theorizing lies the interplay of making inductions (deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from data) and deductions (hypothesizing about the relationships between concepts)" (p. 22).

In looking for the patterns/themes, the first step involved open coding and using the constant comparative method to develop codes. Open coding involved tentatively identifying and categorizing the information using inductive analysis. In the open coding phase, the interview text was reviewed and analyzed for meaning and grouped together. The researcher utilized a constant comparison method as well, continually evaluating new insights by constantly comparing to the previous ones, which led to the creation of a better understanding of the data. In reviewing the transcribed interviews and field notes, a set of codes was developed as recurring regularities began to be revealed.

The second step, axial coding, involved combining the codes into categories. Axial coding is the process of relating the codes to each other by defining the properties of the categories. Similar codes were combined to form a set of categories, as patterns/themes began to emerge. The researcher was cognizant of establishing criteria for category development, through internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Patton (2002) described these criteria as

“...the extent to which the data that belong in a certain category hold together or dovetail in a meaningful way. The second criterion concerns the extent to which differences among the categories are bold and clear” (p. 465).

As the smaller number of categories developed, the emerging themes were assigned to the coded data. This process was complete when the set of categories was saturated and any new sources or insights led to redundancy. Themes or categories and their relationship to other subthemes or subcategories were identified and verified by the researcher. From this process, the researcher developed a codebook (See Appendix D).

The third step involved analyzing how the categories/themes were used to answer the research questions and how they developed the researchers’ results. Four themes emerged from the data: professional experience, networking and the role of the search consultant, the community and the Board of Education (BOE), and racism.

In my effort to stay true to the transmittal of rich, thick descriptions, quotes used in Chapters IV and V are verbatim. Where vernacular appears in the quotations, it was not edited.

### **Research Validity**

Validity in any qualitative study should involve terms such as authenticity, accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness. According to Creswell (2009):

The researcher actively incorporates validity strategies into their proposal. I recommend the use of multiple strategies, and these should enhance the researcher’s ability to access the accuracy of findings as well as convince the readers of that accuracy. There are eight primary strategies, organized from the most frequently used and easy to implement to those occasionally used and more difficult to implement: triangulation, member checking,



use of rich, thick description, researcher bias, negative or discrepant information, prolonged time in the field, peer debriefing, and the use of an external auditor. (p. 191)

To provide trustworthiness of the analysis, Creswell and Miller (1997) advised that the researcher should choose at least two forms of verification for validity of any study. This researcher used three forms of validation: triangulation (data); rich, thick description; and clarifying researcher bias.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation allowed this researcher to use a variety of data sources to establish coherent justification for the themes. The researcher used triangulation to verify emerging themes from the data, and then the different data sources were checked against each other to confirm the findings and to point out any disparities. The data sources used in this study were personal interviews, field notes, and relevant research literature. The researcher used field notes in conjunction with interview transcripts in the qualitative analysis process. This researcher's field notes contained descriptions of what was heard or observed during the interviews. Patton stated, "They should contain everything that the observer believes to worth noting" (2002, p. 302).

**Use of rich, thick description.** The use of rich, thick description gave validation to the findings by the use of descriptors to create a better understanding of the participants' shared experiences. By using rich, thick description, the researcher was allowed access to the setting being described and the sharing of the experiences of the participants. In Chapter IV, a rich description is given for each of the participants, allowing the reader a glimpse into each participant's demeanor, background, and perspective through his or her responses. According to Patton (2002):

With an interview guide approach, answers from different people can be grouped by topics from the guide, but the relevant data won't be found in the same place in each interview. An interview guide, if it has been carefully conceived, actually constitutes a descriptive analytical framework for analysis. (p. 440)

**Researcher bias.** This researcher must make every attempt to limit the bias that may exist in the study. As an African American educator aspiring to become a superintendent, the researcher was aware that her values and preconceptions might have affected her as a researcher. Patton (2002) explained that the researcher will need to "...try to make any biases explicit, take steps to mitigate their influence through rigorous field procedures, and discuss their possible influence in reporting findings" (p. 93). It becomes vital that the researcher presents the findings with rich, thick description and good analysis and not the researcher's "...own personal perspective or voice" (Patton, 2002, p. 93). According to Creswell (2009), this self-reflection creates an open-ended and honest narrative that will resonate well with the reader.

## **Conclusion**

In this qualitative, grounded theory study, the goal was to discover any barriers that African American superintendents overcame to obtain their coveted positions, while sharing their unique experiences and perspectives in pursuing this position. The strategies used in this grounded study, such as open coding, constant comparison, and developing a codebook allowed the researcher to develop meaning and relationships in the participants' interviews. The researcher's use of three forms of verification of validation, consisting of triangulation, rich, thick description, as well as researcher's bias, demonstrated the trustworthiness and validity of the study. Chapter IV presents the findings and results for this study.

## Chapter IV: Findings

“...and you know I think a part of that also lends to the question of again, the role as a Black superintendent – what is your role? Are you a Black superintendent or are you a superintendent of schools?” (Participant, Personal Communication)

This study explored whether or not there were perceived factors that precluded African Americans from the superintendency in NYS, excluding NYC. Additionally, this study was designed to explore the personal perspectives and experiences of NYS’s African American superintendents as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position, as well any barriers and challenges they encountered in this process. The barriers and challenges voiced by the participating African American superintendents were supported in the literature review.

This chapter presents the findings obtained through an analysis of personal and telephone interviews. The results of this study come from the lived narrative experiences of each of the seven participating African American superintendents. This study allowed for each of them to share their experiences and have their voices heard. By participating in this research, their stories have been added to the very limited existing literature on African American superintendents and educational leaders.

Qualitative in-depth interviewing was the technique for data collection, which allowed access and exploration of the research questions. A protocol guide was developed in conjunction with the interview questions, which aided in conducting the interviews, by allowing the researcher to tailor the interview for the participants. During the interviews, some of the questions may not have been asked due to the participants answering them at some point prior. Each interview was taped and transcribed as soon as possible after the interview occurred. Data

analysis was ongoing with constant comparison, open-ended and inductive, discovering patterns, themes and categories.

The reported results are the findings using only data from the seven African Americans in NYS who agreed to participate in this study. The findings are not generalizable to all African American superintendents. Nevertheless, this study gave participants a voice to produce a view into how they were able to pursue and successfully obtain the position of superintendent. The main intention of this study was to hear their voices and share their experiences.

### **Description of Participants**

Due to the small sample for this study, every effort was made by the researcher to maintain the anonymity of the participants, as stated in Chapter III. Participants represented a purposeful sampling of the African American superintendents in NYS. There were two criteria used to identify participants for this study: self-identification as being African American and current occupation of a superintendent position in NYS (excluding NYC). There were seventeen African American superintendents in NYS outside of NYC during the time of this study, and all seventeen were contacted by a letter of introduction to the study, followed up with phone calls and email contacts. Ten days after the initial contact, three superintendents agreed to participate in the study. A second round of phone calls and emails were sent out to the remaining fifteen superintendents to secure their participation in the study. From this second round of contacts, two more superintendents agreed to participate. Two weeks later, a third round of phone calls and emails were sent out to the remaining thirteen superintendents; two more participants were then added. Ultimately, seven of the 17 African American superintendents agreed to participate in this study, representing a variety of experiences, education, districts, and gender, which consisted of four male and three female superintendents.

An interview was arranged with each superintendent once he or she had signed the Informed Consent Document, consenting to participate in the study. Each of the seven superintendents participated in a personal interview for over 60 minutes. Of the seven interviews, four were conducted via the telephone, and three were conducted in person at the participant's district office.

Just over 40% of NYS's African American superintendents participated in the study. The number of years the participants served as superintendents in their current district ranged from 2 years to 12 years, with an average of 5.5 years. The number of years that they have been in a superintendent position ranged from 4 years to 35 years, with an average of 12.5. The number of years the participants served in administrative positions ranged from 16 years to 37 years, with an average of 26 years of total administrative experience.

The seven participating superintendents represented four suburban school districts and three urban school districts. Of those, one suburban school district's majority student population was Hispanic, and one urban school district's majority student population was White. See Table 1 for a summary of participants' demographic profiles.

Additional profile data included (a) 100% of the African American superintendents in this study had obtained their doctorate, (b) six out of seven (88%) were currently eligible to retire, (c) five out of seven (71%) had served as superintendents in other districts, (d) four of the seven (57%) were currently serving in districts with predominantly White student demographics, with one of the seven serving in a predominantly Hispanic school district, (e) four of the seven (57%) identified themselves as African American, while three of the seven (43%) identified themselves as Caribbean American, and (f) three of the seven (42%) were divorced.

Table 1

*Participating Superintendents' Demographic Profiles*

Type of District	Ethnicity	Age Range	Doctoral Degree
Urban	African American	55+	Y
Urban	African American	55+	Y
Suburban	Caribbean American	Under 55	Y
Suburban	African American	55+	Y
Urban	Caribbean American	55+	Y
Suburban	African American	55+	Y
Suburban	Caribbean American	Under 55	Y

**Superintendent A.** Superintendent A was interviewed in person at the district office.

This superintendent was at ease, self-confident, and personable throughout the over 60 interview, answering each question in detail. Superintendent A was married with children.

**Superintendent B.** Superintendent B initially began the interview in person, but due to time constraints, completed the bulk of it via telephone. Superintendent B was polite and courteous, with a quiet yet strong demeanor. This superintendent answered each question in great length, periodically checking with the researcher to verify the question being asked.

Superintendent B was married with children.

**Superintendent C.** Superintendent C was interviewed in person at the district office.

Superintendent C was amenable, with a quick wit and a sharp sense of purpose. Superintendent C was married with children.

**Superintendent D.** Superintendent D was interviewed via a telephone. Superintendent D was immediately open, honest, and willing to share personal experiences. Superintendent D was divorced with children.

**Superintendent E.** Superintendent E's interview was conducted in person in the district office. Superintendent E was intense, focused, and self-assured throughout the interview, answering questions clearly and concisely. Superintendent E was divorced with one child.

**Superintendent F.** Superintendent F was interviewed via a telephone. Superintendent F was soft-spoken and reserved in demeanor, answering questions concisely and to the point. As the interview progressed, Superintendent F shared some personal experiences encountered as he or she sought a position in the superintendency. Superintendent F was married with children.

**Superintendent G.** Superintendent G was interviewed via a telephone. Superintendent G was bold and forthright, with a self-confidence that came across in his or her responses to the interview questions. Superintendent G was divorced.

### **Emergent Themes**

From reviewing the participants' interview transcripts and the researcher's field notes, four prevalent themes emerged. The four prevalent themes were:

1. Professional experience
2. Networking and the role of the search consultant
3. Community and the board of education (BOE)
4. Racism

Data collected from the interviews were analyzed and reviewed. The process entailed living with the data, constantly comparing as new patterns and themes emerged. The process

was finished when repetition and saturation of the data was complete and no new information was forthcoming. This section will discuss each of the four emerging themes.

**Professional Experience.** It was clear from the data that each of the superintendents believed that their professional positions and educational background helped them to be prepared for the superintendency. The positions that they held along the path to the superintendency and/or their educational experiences put them into the arena of the superintendency, thus better preparing them for the role.

*Superintendent A.* Superintendent A held two positions as a teacher and as an assistant superintendent over a period of six years before becoming a superintendent. Superintendent A was not looking to go into the superintendency and stated the following:

You know, it's interesting. I actually had no desire to go into the superintendency.

Largely because the superintendency was, at least I always viewed it to be, so undefined and nebulous. Versus as the Assistant Superintendent, things were much more concrete, much more defined. You could see the direct impact of your results. Being a person who is much more results-oriented, I thought that it was a better fit. So, from that standpoint, I didn't go, I didn't, I kind of, quite frankly, I didn't have an initial intention to go into the superintendency. So I didn't go through a lot of quote/unquote, "...superintendency preparation program and all of the things that are taking place now." I actually didn't do any of those things at all.

Superintendent A believed that the experiences/positions in education helped to hone in on their leadership skills. This participant asserted:

But because of fair experiences within the organization, I was the person most capable and most exposed, most knowledgeable, most experienced to lead the organization. So



my preparation to the superintendency came from quite frankly everything else I did prior to that in terms of really understanding the ins and outs of a school district and not just focus on one particular aspect of the school district.

This participant felt very strongly that his or her own leadership skills and the positions that they held were tied to the leadership skills that were necessary to move successfully into the superintendent position.

***Superintendent B.*** Superintendent B held four positions in education, from teaching to assistant superintendent over the period of 12 years before obtaining a superintendent position. Superintendent B participated in a preparatory program specifically aimed at African Americans for the superintendency very early in their career. This superintendent recalled how he or she heard about it: "...my superintendent said there was a program that was sponsored by the Washington Foundation and it was to help train and prepare minorities to move into the superintendency because there were so few in the country."

Superintendent B was able to participate in this program, gaining the opportunity to experience working alongside African American superintendents in urban districts. As a participant in the program, Superintendent B did not have access to the urban superintendents as they had presumed. They stated,

...but I didn't work as closely with those superintendents as I thought I was going to but I worked with their staffs and I attended cabinet meetings and other types of things. ...so I got some understanding as to what a superintendent might be like by being in the Washington program, whose purpose, the purpose of the Washington program was to put minority superintendents, minority candidates with minority superintendents into situations where they could learn what the superintendency was all about.

Once the preparatory program was completed, it took over one year and 70 applications for Superintendent B to obtain a position as an assistant superintendent. However, Superintendent B felt that the position of assistant superintendent allowed access to learn more about the superintendency than any classes by asserting, “Nothing in my academic work prepared me to be a practicing superintendent of schools.” This superintendent further asserted:

So while I was doing that, and I was the operations assistant superintendent, so I learned about evaluating principals and visiting principals and running...there were only two assistant superintendents so you get your hands on a lot of stuff. I’ve been in executive session and interfacing between the board and the superintendent, so I’ve seen that close up.

***Superintendent C.*** Superintendent C held seven positions that included teacher, program coordinator, and assistant superintendent over a period of 16 years before obtaining a superintendent position. Superintendent C did not go to college to be a teacher or educator, but instead to be a clinical psychologist, and did not take any education courses. Eventually this participant became certified as a social studies teacher in the NYC School District, with no intentions of seeking the superintendency. Superintendent C’s view on this was the following:

People arrive in the superintendency in many different ways. Some are the people who early in their career they tell me they want to be a superintendent. Others are kind of by accident. I’m one of those persons who became a superintendent where preparation met opportunity. I spent 11.5 years as a classroom teacher in New York City. During that time I got my certification, my administrator’s certification. I was district coordinator of summer schools for two years. I participated in a program that was geared to prepare minorities for administrative positions.

Superintendent C felt that the assistant superintendent position, however, offered much in development toward the superintendency. Superintendent C had served in three other administrative positions but stated the following observation,

But for the superintendency, my preparation was as an assistant superintendent. I tried to learn as much as I can. During the year of the interim, I basically was the chief operating officer and the interim, he didn't really care. He played a lot of golf and he would disappear so I basically ran the district on a day-to-day basis.

***Superintendent D.*** Superintendent D had held five different positions, from a teacher to an assistant superintendent over a period of 35 years before becoming a superintendent. Superintendent D had spent 13 years in the classroom, two years as a director of special education, and then became a principal. This participant left the principal position for one year to participate in a doctoral program at an Ivy League school with an urban superintendent program. Superintendent D described the program:

And that was the program that was specifically developed to train minorities: women, men, African American, Latinos, Asians to become superintendent in urban school districts and it was very competitive program. They only expected ten students a year out of the 1,000 that applied. So I felt very lucky to be among that group.

This program allowed for the interns to work closely with the sponsoring superintendents, which gave them a true perspective on the superintendency in a large urban district. Superintendent D further stated:

Preparation was that you spent six months as an intern under an urban superintendent, and I requested and was chosen by a prestigious African American superintendent to be his intern. He was smart...huge district like that he really taught me that it is important to

put systems in place and to ensure that you're not sitting up in the ivory tower no matter how big and no matter how demanding the job is. But you also have to let people be in charge, hold them accountable, and he taught me how to really turn theory into practice.

According to Superintendent D, this preparation was excellent, and through it he or she received a doctorate degree. Superintendent D stated:

The program lasted a year of intense study on campus, from July to July. And that attending that you received another masters and then you went into the doctoral stage of your program. I did earn my doctorate in 2003. And then from there I made the decision that I needed, that I wanted to be a superintendent.

***Superintendent E.*** Superintendent E had held eight different positions, from a teacher to a deputy superintendent over a period of 24 years before becoming a superintendent.

Superintendent E did not participate in any preparatory program nor had any interest in administration early on. This superintendent felt that their experiences and the people they met through those experiences were excellent preparation for the job of the superintendency.

Superintendent E made the following comments:

You know what; I never thought...the superintendency was never my goal. I...again, I always said the same preparation, just making sure that your classrooms are safe, secure, and igniting fire in terms of instruction. So I never really headed for the superintendency. It's all evolution. I mean I never did a prep program, I never thought of myself as a superintendent. I mean I am a curriculum auditor for a well-known professional educational association so I've done lots of audits all over the country...so I surround myself with really good, I mean really, really good people. And they've always said you

know, you would make a really good superintendent. I was always interested in the work. And I still am.

Superintendent E felt that having a strong background in instruction/curriculum, especially in math and science, as well as the ability to use data to drive instruction allowed them to be noticed and gain a positive reputation in the community.

***Superintendent F.*** Superintendent F held over five positions, from a teacher to a deputy superintendent over a period of 28 years before becoming a superintendent. Superintendent F felt fortunate to have participated in two different preparatory programs during their career. The first was primarily aimed at the principalship, which was sponsored by the school district.

Superintendent F recalled the following:

...before I went into the principalship, I participated in a program that was under the school system that was sponsored by the Washington Foundation. And they identified people with leadership potential and I applied for that and I was selected. It was approximately ten of us out of a pool of 200 and some odd people. And so that began my exposure to administration.

This superintendent also participated in another preparatory program that was aimed specifically at the superintendency. Superintendent F remembered being in the first cohort for this program:

I participated in the superintendent prepared program that was organized through the school district. And the McMurray Group was the lead group that sponsored that training with I...I'm thinking back and I think it was in conjunction with the Creative Leadership Center in North Carolina. And so you know of course it was an application process and then out of that process several of us were selected from across the country.

Superintendent F felt that the programs were a benefit for them to gain insight into administration in both positions. This participant further commented about the merits of the superintendent program by stating:

And we stayed together all the time and kept up, all of us kept in touch to see who was doing what and I would say probably out of this group, all of us got an opportunity, maybe except three, all of us got an opportunity to serve as superintendent and I think I'm one of the last ones that might still be in the superintendency. The others have retired or they're doing something different.

***Superintendent G.*** Superintendent G held five positions, from a teacher to a deputy superintendent over a period of 24 years. Superintendent G did not participate in any preparatory programs. Superintendent G felt that the experiences from, as well as the effort put into, their various jobs in education were pertinent in obtaining a position in the superintendency.

Superintendent G stated:

At the time when I came up, no, I did not have an internship, but I... what I really...to be candid with you, at every level I really just strived to be effective where I was and it almost seemed as though people watched me and looked at me; that they kept saying, OK you're ready for the next track. To a large, to a large degree.

***Summary.*** During the discussions with participants, each one expressed the importance of career experiences in gaining the skills necessary to handle the job of the superintendency. Four out of the seven participated in preparatory programs for either administration and/or the superintendency, yet each still felt that the program, combined with their various educational positions, more than prepared them for the duties necessary for the superintendency.

**Networking and the role of the search consultant.** A second emergent theme from this study combined networking and the role of the search consultants. All seven of the superintendents believed that networking was essential in their obtaining positions, not only for the superintendency but also for any of their educational positions. In their interviews, all seven superintendents expressed through their comments how their informal connections had a major influence on them learning about job positions and getting positions. A few of the superintendents mentioned that the *old boy* network was still pertinent on the landscape of getting positions, but overall the informal networking that comes from working with others in administration and through professional affiliations and working in conjunction with search consultants/head hunters was still how most received notices about and obtained positions.

***Superintendent A.*** Superintendent A applied to all of the positions in administration but stated it was always by invitation to apply. This superintendent commented:

...that was very interesting because while I technically applied, it was only after being asked to apply. And I said it because in all of the instances so far, I never felt compelled to apply to someplace else because someplace else was more attractive or I wasn't happy with where I was. And in the case of District X, to be quite frank with you, the Superintendent at District X who was a good colleague of the Superintendent of District Z said hey I'm looking for somebody good. And yes, I had to technically apply because they had a process, but I went into the process knowing that...I hate to say it this way...it was mine to lose so to speak, because there was a clear favoring by the Superintendent of District X for my candidacy because of their background and knowledge and recommendation from the Superintendent at District Z.

This informal networking with other administrators, in particular superintendents, was important, if not key, to getting Superintendent A's positions, including having had a positive relationship with search consultants in the community. Superintendent A was pursued by a search consultant for two positions and had these comments about search consultants:

...even in those instances you find out that it still comes back to a network of knowing consultants, who the lead consultants are, and who are the people that you need to talk to. And you find out very quickly that you know while you may have a process with 20 or 30 or 40 people in it, oftentimes there is a small handful of candidates that are the ones, the prime candidates that are the ones that are being looked at from the very beginning. So we...the system now I think has a tremendous reliance on consultants who bring a stable of top candidates to the table for boards to consider.

***Superintendent B.*** Superintendent B had served as superintendent in eight school districts in four states. In half of those positions, this participant was asked to apply, and two of the positions were appointments to the superintendency.

And I then went to work to... I was consultant for the New York State Department of Education and was supported by the Board of Regents to serve at District H, New York school board as the appointed, one of the appointed members of that five-person board.

Then I became the superintendent in another state. ...the board of education is appointed by the Mayor, he appoints them directly.

Superintendent B was also pursued by search consultants, yet highly recommended that aspiring administrators have to be advocates for themselves and apply for jobs.

And when I was in another state, the guy who is the search consultant who had the superintendent consultancies had worked for our district as an evaluator and he wanted



me to be a candidate for District M in New York and I needed to apply for that. So I have been an advocate of people applying. If you see a spot in the newspaper or through an advertisement, you apply for it. ...you have...you meet up with a search consultant for different conventions or meetings, take your chance to know them, tell them who you are and let people know who you are and that you have an interest in certain types of spots.

***Superintendent C.*** Superintendent C had a number of positions that were not the traditional administrative positions, as they were appointed administrative positions through BOCES. Superintendent C provided insights into the importance of informal networking in seeking positions.

Then came September... the principalship opened up back in my old division at BOCES. So that superintendent called me and said \*\*\*\*\*, I want you to go back to your division. So then I did in...I arrived there as a principal of the adult high school. And I stayed there until I got a call from the superintendent at District L who was part of that team that I mentioned earlier. He said you want to talk to me about coming to work for me. So we talked about that, and I had lunch with him. He said I've got four jobs, tell me which one you want; high school principal, middle school principal, funded programs, I'll tell you where. So I said I want funded programs. So I was hired in District L, as the assistant to the superintendent. And I was a general man Friday. You know, whatever the hell he didn't want to do.

Superintendent C felt that informal networking allowed for contacts with the right people and eventually this participant was involved in forming supports for other African American administrators and superintendents.

It was informal networking. And the gentleman who actually initiated it, he has a phrase that he used and he said he learned from IBM: “When you’re having a good day, the group needs you. But when you’re having a bad day, you need the group.”

Superintendent C had dealt with search consultants on both sides of the fence, both as an applicant and as a representative of the needs of a district. Superintendent C felt that search consultants wielded a lot of power regarding who got in front of a BOE for an interview.

Superintendent C stated the following:

If a search consultant wants you to get the job, he can’t guarantee the job but he can come more than 60% assurance. Because the circumstances, first of all they can stack the deck to make sure the one they want gets it. But you have to be careful how you stack because you can stack too much in one favor and you get the “he just did it to make sure she doesn’t get it,” so you have to be careful. But search consultants can also advocate for candidates by speaking to boards and Candidate X, you don’t have to bother with Candidate X. Candidate X really is not just a good candidate but I vouch for... you know, so on and so on. Because search consultants, many of the search consultants are former superintendents. So they know the field and they know the boards, they know the profession and they know their colleagues who are among their candidates, so they can create an atmosphere or an environment, conditions if you will, where it allows for the candidates to move forward.

***Superintendent D.*** The majority of Superintendent D’s administrative positions were in one district, and he or she worked the way up in the ranks. Superintendent D made a conscious effort to apply to a different district in another state in order to gain more experience in

administration. In another position, contacts and informal network assisted in obtaining the participant's current superintendent position.

And so I got a call and a very, very good friend... a woman who is the assistant superintendent of personnel... and she called me at home one night and she said listen, I want you to do something. These people have contacted me and they want to talk with you. And I said what people? And she said Knob Tree School. And I said I've never heard of that. ...and I said no. I said look, I have too many skills you know... They kept calling me and so finally I said OK, I will talk to them.

***Superintendent E.*** Superintendent E was fortunate when it came to obtaining administrative positions. In two districts, this superintendent held several positions, rising to the level of the assistant superintendent. The only position that Superintendent E had ever applied for was the current superintendent position.

.... I had been doing a lot of workshops and people noticed me and District M invited me to apply. And District L, the same thing, they invited me too. So I've been invited in many places to apply to because what one of things. My passion was data. I was a math/physics person. So I was doing a lot of using data to inform instruction and other things and so people noticed me. And then I got invited to apply.

Superintendent E had limited contact with search consultants, but they had experience when one was used by the BOE of their current district to fill the superintendent position.

Superintendent E felt that:

There is a stable, I mean the Standard Group; which I find so offensive in the sense of they have their stable and they decide... If I had wanted to be a superintendent I definitely would not have used them because my background and who I am and

who...what I stand for would not fit in where they would want me to be put. You know. They would probably wait for District Q to open up to ask me to... so they don't give you the districts where you can shine.

***Superintendent F.*** Superintendent F was promoted through the ranks in one large urban school district. Superintendent F applied to numerous districts, getting to the final rounds as a candidate but with no success. It was in the current position that informal networking connections provided the necessary information and a recommendation.

And I received a call about this particular position and, you know I was hesitant because I had, I had been trying to get the superintendency and it wasn't working. And I had gotten so close in several situations and I just didn't know if I wanted to do it. But anyway I was convinced to give it a try and so I came up for the interview and the rest is history.

***Superintendent G.*** Superintendent G believed strongly that doing good work at whatever position you were in would open doors of opportunity. However, informal networks of associates and friends play a large part in obtaining positions.

Of course since I was working as an assistant principal and based on my work as an assistant principal, I was literally handed one day a bunch of applications from my then principal, who was also a friend. And he said it's time for you to go. And I said what, are you not happy with my services anymore? And he said no, he said you're just too damn good to be an assistant principal. And so he handed me these applications and I filled them out reluctantly. And I wound up getting two interviews at two different schools and wound up [with] both picking me as principal and I had to wind up choosing which school I wanted to go to. It was the same situation when I became a deputy

superintendent. Actually, working as principal for five years across from another principal who became superintendent. He became superintendent and then said, I need your help. I would like you to become my deputy superintendent and that's how I became deputy superintendent....

**Summary.** Each of the participants interviewed were able to access positions through their informal networks and contacts at some point in their educational careers. All felt that their informal networking was key in making connections. Many of the superintendents believed that it was vital to get to know search consultants and for the search consultants to get to know whom the participants were as potential superintendents.

**The community and the board of education.** The third emergent theme from this study was the familiarity with the political landscape of the community and the BOE. This encompasses gaining an understanding of the culture of a district/community, the dynamics of the BOE, and the demographics of the district/community.

**Superintendent A.** Superintendent A felt strongly that a superintendent needs to connect his or her own personal values with that of any potential district/community that could become a work environment.

I think that when I consider where I'm going to become a superintendent or whatever my next move might be, I have to consider my lifestyle and do I want to live in a certain...not that I can't effectively be a superintendent in an urban, suburban or rural but it's a lifetime, a choice preference that has to come into the question because you know that you have to have a life beyond the superintendency as well. So those things were considered to me in terms of that. The type of needs of community...I think to some degree comes into play but not to a large degree. Because quite frankly, every

community has their share of needs, has their share of politics that might be different. Every superintendent, I think, regardless of where you are, is facing some very similar struggles and challenges as well as having similar opportunities. I think again it's there oftentimes, people say certain communities have more or less, I think they're different problems and I think that you have to be geared up to address the difference in those problems. Someone who is successful in a suburban setting may not be successful in an urban setting and vice versa, you could have someone who would be successful in all settings. I think it depends on your personality...

Superintendent A went on to explain how important it was for any superintendent to understand the BOE dynamics of a prospective district.

So yes, I think that is a key component in the hiring process. I think as a superintendent, as the prospective superintendent is to understand the board that you will be dealing with currently as well as the dynamics and potential change of the board once you start your superintendency. Because timing becomes a critical part of it because oftentimes if you are hired within a year, in maybe a year so to speak, and then by the time you start your superintendency you have two or three new board members. The dynamics could change before you even start your position. So board dynamics is absolutely critical as part of the hiring process as well as part of your success and sustainability on the job.

***Superintendent B.*** Superintendent B believed that a superintendent had to research and get to know the community in which they were potentially looking to work in.

But you have to really look at the superintendent opening. Know the history of the community to determine whether that school district possibly would give you an interview and possibly could select you. Otherwise you're wasting your time, you may

be in the mix, but the chances of getting selected at many of those places are going to be problematic.

***Superintendent C.*** Superintendent C felt that a potential superintendent needed to know what the capabilities of a district were and how you may be able to work within those possible limitations. Superintendent C went on to explain about the financial ramifications of a small district versus a large district and why a potential superintendent needs to take this into account when applying to any district.

At that time, yes. Now, like now, if I were to apply for a position now, and I have searched with search consultants, I don't want to go to one of them for black districts. A – I've been there twice and don't want to go back. B – I think I'm as good as any superintendent so I deserve to be anywhere. 3 - I don't want to go to a small city unless they call and offer me a lot of money because small cities don't have the resources you need. So right now, if I were to apply for a superintendency in New York I would apply to two districts. A – the high performing suburban districts; you know local district A and district B, those. Or the large urban districts like Syracuse, Rochester, New York City.

***Superintendent D.*** Superintendent D connected personal values with knowing the political climate of a district. Superintendent D felt very strongly that aspiring superintendents need to know their personal value systems and keep those values in mind when applying for superintendent positions.

Those who are really good, that's what I see about the really good superintendents, either they have nonnegotiable values; those values center around children. They understand the importance of the political environment. But they're not going to allow...

they're going to figure out a way to get around the politics to do what's best for children. What kind of political knowledge do you need to bring? How do you play politics one place differently from another? How do you know...what do you know about yourself as a communicator? What people do you need to be around that will most be affected by how you choose to communicate? It's got to be about you because you choose them and then they'll choose you. But you've got to own who you want to go to, so that you wind up where you want to be. Other than that, you might get snatched up in a situation that is not a good one.

***Superintendent E.*** Superintendent E generously shared the experiences that had occurred with various BOEs and had strong advice to any aspiring superintendents about knowing the BOE as one enters into the superintendency.

So that's one thing I would say to all folks who are going for the superintendency. Make sure you have a majority; a super majority because any election you can... When I got the job I signed on April 3rd, I remember these dates. I signed the contract April 3rd and I said to them, I'm not coming unless it's a 5-0 vote. And if it's a 5-0 vote, because I don't want to...and with a 5-0 vote any election can flip it. So this man had run on a campaign that I wasn't the most qualified person and that the other candidate was more qualified. ...I got the opportunity to face him down on that in the boardroom because he did win. So I'm telling you that I was a 5-0 on April 3rd. By April 17th there was a board election and I became a 3-2. My first year.

***Superintendent F.*** Superintendent F expressed why they had preferred to apply to certain types of districts and not just send out random applications to all openings.



Because I was...my interests and my experience had been in large, in a large urban district. And that's what I knew. I mean I felt very knowledgeable about urban education. The districts that I applied for were large urban districts.

As Superintendent F described their feelings when meeting the BOE of a district for the first time during the interview process, it became apparent that the first impressions of the BOE weighed heavily in the participant's decision to take the position.

I felt...when I first met the board here, it was just like, I felt a real good connection with them. In terms of our conversation and just, just open communication. And I just, I don't know, I think it was just a good fit. And that's what I'm saying, in a lot of these interviews, you have, it has to be the right chemistry. And I really felt that it was there. I had a wonderful board when I came here.

***Superintendent G.*** Superintendent G's first superintendent position was in one of NYC's districts, which has a different procedure for hiring the superintendent positions. There is an application process, but a committee headed by the Chancellor and his cabinet appoints superintendents. It was when this superintendent left the NYC School District that they encountered the differences of dealing with smaller communities and all that it entails. This superintendent expressed how the position of the superintendency could become very complicated with the different stakeholder groups. Superintendent G stated:

It can be wearing, especially in urban districts where you're dealing with so many different stakeholders. You're dealing with the stakeholders who are interested in corruption. You're dealing with stakeholders who are interested in nepotism. You are dealing with stakeholders who are interested in making certain that jobs go to certain people, friendships, make decisions, money can be had in ways that could be literally

unethical or illegal. And you're also...you have to deal with the parents of the affluent versus the parents of the poor. And they want very different things. They value very different things for their kids. The parents of the affluent have one direction, they don't feel...they feel testing is overdone. They feel that their children require more challenges. And they are not wrong because they prepare their children better. You know, whereas parents of poverty, you can't always get them motivated enough to come out to a PTA dinner and the parents of the affluent feel that so much time is devoted to the children of the parents of poverty that they feel that their children are missing something in the transition.... So there are so many different networks and groupings that you have. It can be quite challenging and quite wearing when you try to really do what you can to make all children succeed at all levels.

**Racism.** All seven of the interviewed superintendents expressed their experiences with racism and/or their perspective on racism and how it impacted them with regard to the superintendency.

*Superintendent A.* Superintendent A had very strong feelings and comments pertaining to race/racism and how it affects the superintendency. Superintendent A stated the following on the impact of racism on African American applicants,

And how do we change the potential Black candidates if you will. How do you change their mindset of how they see their viability in pursuing higher leadership positions? Because I think that too many ways...people have fallen prey to the very limiting perceptions that I won't get hired anyway. I don't need to apply. And so you know, you kind of fall prey to that piece versus, you know what, the only way we're going to change the numbers of the game is to have more people playing. ...I think that's the deep stain

of racism in this country that people still hold on to what they perceive was and it's still perpetuated in their daily behaviors and actions. ...Your perception of your race shouldn't be the limitation that prevents you from applying and pursuing your goals and let your competency speak for itself.

Superintendent A believes that if you have the strength of leadership and personal integrity, then one can emerge successfully as superintendent.

***Superintendent B.*** Superintendent B believes that there is still a line of demarcation as it pertains to opportunities for African Americans to become superintendents in predominately White districts.

I think if you were to take qualified African American superintendents, put them next to qualified white superintendents, and take a look at where there are going to be opportunities for selections, I would think that in an urban area most urban areas are going to probably make a choice to go for a minority. And in most of the suburban areas you're going to find them having a White superintendent, because of the constituency...

Superintendent B continued with the following comment, "The reality is that it doesn't matter what your education/training is, that the predominant leaders in suburban school systems are going to be White. And African American minority superintendents are going to be selected predominantly by urban districts." With this strong belief, Superintendent B had only worked in urban school districts. This was consistent with the personal belief throughout Superintendent B's career that it would be a waste of effort putting in applications in predominantly White school districts.

***Superintendent C.*** Superintendent C was very purposeful when applying to the current district. This superintendent explained that there was specificity in looking for a district that was

not a predominantly Black district, but a district that had diversity, yet was in an urban setting. Superintendent C had always worked in predominantly Black districts and knew the challenges that plagued most Black urban districts in NYS.

When I applied to this district, I was impressed with what I saw on the website. Issues of diversity and so forth. At the time I applied for this district, there were like 20 African American superintendents. And where African Americans are pigeonholed. And I wanted to get to the board and this district offered me an opportunity to do that. And I didn't know anyone in this city. I felt that it was a good place... And I wanted that to be a factor. That was the whole thing, not the regular suspects. Where you are, you are the Black superintendent as opposed to a district superintendent who happens to be Black. And for people who are starting out, that's fine. But for someone who's been there already, I don't need to do that again.

***Superintendent D.*** Superintendent D had also worked in a large, urban, predominantly Black district. This superintendent felt that, in order to be more marketable to any district, they would need to gain more experience in a different school setting. Superintendent D expressed concern about having limited contact with other demographic populations and realized that race was an important factor in their search for superintendent positions. Superintendent D commented:

Actually that was probably in 1999 that I went to New District, Washington and I became the assistant superintendent of secondary education. And the reason I went to New District was because I had spent an enormous part of my educational experience in predominantly African American minority centers. I knew if I wanted to lead and especially as I had come out of the south, I would like to be leading predominantly white

school districts. Or huge urban districts that I would have to deal with white folks in the political arena and not having the experience I felt was extraordinarily critical that I go someplace where I would be immersed in a white culture. And learn how to understand white needs. And New District Washington is pretty white bread, but it is always pretty liberal, and at the time I didn't realize how liberal it was. It definitely is a white environment. It was an extraordinarily important decision that I made and I'm very glad that I had the insight to do that, because it truly held me in good stead to lead white folks.

Superintendent D's first superintendency was in NYS. Coming to a much smaller district with diversity, this superintendent felt that an experience in different settings would be a strength going into that position. Yet within the first month on the job, Superintendent D encountered blatant racism:

...but my first month I was called a nigger. Well, maybe not my first month, maybe within the second month. I received a phone call one day and I was told nigger, you don't know what you're doing. And then they hung up. Around, right around that same time, they had what they do every year, which is their public forum; forum where the public can come and speak on anything they want to. The forum was in the public library. It was probably my first introduction to the community outside of the reception that gave me and the board meetings. And I visited some of the neighborhood and things but this was you know the public, any public. Well, I've never been in a situation like where I was thrust into... the community was threatening, they were disrespectful, they were rude. At one point they told me that I should get on my hands and knees and crawl to beg the football coach not to leave the district. The football coach was trying to blackmail me into letting him be the athletic director even though he had no

qualifications whatsoever. I wouldn't do that. ...they also said in the course of the meeting that only way administrators should get tenure is that they should be paraded before them and that they would do a thumbs up or a thumbs down. At that point when they told me to crawl to him, I stood up and in my best teacher voice said, that is enough. You have to show manners at the very least. At the end of that meeting I made a choice and it was terrible choice. I made the choice to dig in and stay and make it work.

***Superintendent E.*** Superintendent E expressed frustration that African American candidates were being geared toward Black school districts and not being given opportunities to get a foot in the door of predominantly White school districts. Superintendent E mentioned that some of these districts prefer to hire someone White with much less experience rather someone Black with a doctorate and experience.

...there are really qualified people that I know of color. This woman is the superintendent right now... in New Jersey. She had to leave New York. You know she has a doctorate. She's done everything, through the ranks; teacher, principal, curriculum and she could not get through. And now she had to leave and go to New Jersey. They did work with the search consultants but the search consultants put them in the same places. All the time. I see so many of my colleagues who are trying to get positions who are at the deputy level where as I see you know like this young guy in...38 years old who just got District Q. He doesn't know anything...he just got it. I mean, I see all these young white males. Watch the trend right now, young white males. Now it's these young guys, no experience, because they will work for nothing for now.

***Superintendent F.*** Superintendent F commented that they had established a rapport with a search consultant firm in which there was comfort in expressing themselves with some

frankness. Superintendent F felt that this allowed for some realistic perspective of the real opportunities to obtain a position. This superintendent stated:

And the one, and because I knew them I think felt comfortable saying to me, I wouldn't even bother. Because it's no point in wasting...I have a feeling that, you know, don't waste my time. Tell me that this is a good...this would be a good place for me to apply. Don't have me go through the interview and you know, that they aren't even going to look at me because I'm not the right hue. So I'm a realist.

***Superintendent G.*** Superintendent G felt that there was an obligation, as well as a responsibility, to put back into the Black community, which is why this superintendent was primarily attracted to urban districts. However, with this commitment to the Black community came some harsh realities. Superintendent G commented:

Well, I'll be candid. Part of the reason I chose to move in this direction was because I felt I had a responsibility to so many African American and even whites who gave their lives for civil rights and I felt the best way for me to have an impact was to stay with my own people and try to help my own children more than not, achieve so that we could indeed stand on the shoulders of giants who made it possible for us to achieve. Our kids are still very much shunted in terms of getting all the resources and opportunities that the white kids have. I have been, I must say, I have been more attracted to my own urban school districts. Now I will say to you that at this time in my life if I were to go for another superintendency, I would probably go to a more suburbanized district. Only because the hardest people to work with are sometimes your own.

**Summary of emergent themes.** Analysis of the data presented four themes: professional experience, networking and the role of the search consultant/head hunter, the political landscape of the community and the BOE, and racism.

Participants' responses revealed commonalities of experiences. All encountered similar experiences in one form or fashion, as they pursued the position of superintendent. Participants' responses, as it pertains to the research questions, are in the following section.

### **Research Question Findings**

Each research question is presented, followed by a summary of the responses and specific quotes that support the summary. The research questions were:

1. What are the similarities and differences of perception regarding barriers to the superintendency that exist among the African American superintendents?
2. What are the similarities and differences of perception of African American superintendents regarding strategies they utilized to overcome the barriers to the superintendency?
3. What are the similarities and differences of the communities/districts in which the African American superintendents now serve?
4. What are the similarities and differences in the background of the African American superintendents in this study?
5. How do the African American superintendents view race as it pertains to attaining superintendent positions in NYS?



**Research Question 1: *What are the similarities and differences of perception regarding barriers to the superintendency that exist among the African American superintendents?***

Responses from participants to question one were diverse. When asked this question directly, the superintendents had different responses and related personal experiences. Their responses included perceptions of self, the role of the search consultants to gender bias, the *pipeline*, and issues of race. Based on their own personal experiences or what they had observed in their careers with other African American superintendents/educators, their responses varied widely and revealed no singular barrier.

One participant spoke of self-perception as a barrier, stating:

I...again I know I have people who may disagree with me about this perspective but I'm not a color, I'm a person. And I'm a person with competencies. I'm a person with ambitions. And those are the things that drive what I do and how I perceive myself and how I perceive others. How others perceive me, that's their prerogative. But how I perceive myself is based upon those thing and so you know, I don't necessarily say that, OK, my role is to...or I'm going to make sure that all kids who look like me get preferential treatment.

Another participant felt strongly that gender bias was a silent barrier, especially for African American superintendents. This respondent reported personal experiences with discrimination based on gender for a number of positions in education. She stated,

We're women, if we're African American women we've been told that we're either whores or a mammy and there's no place as a whore or mammy to be a superintendent, so how do you even see yourself being strong enough to do those things?

Gender was also observed by another participant:

If you're African American, are you coming out of a sharecroppers you know? These stereotypes are truly alive and well, certainly back then and then the stereotype of being a woman and wanting to move into the superintendent's position. You, most women were very happy to become assistant superintendent, maybe even deputy, but to be the superintendent, they were probably...I would say there were, maybe 100 throughout the whole country. But I don't think that many because when I used to go to national conferences for superintendents, all I saw were white males.

The pipeline was another issue identified as a barrier affecting African Americans from obtaining positions. One superintendent stated:

It has been the pipeline for success for a few but also a defining barrier for many. So sometimes people say well, education is failing, whatever. But to some degree it is but to some the same degree that it is, it has also allowed opportunities for others as well. So the question then becomes why we haven't seen more people who choose education as a career. Because when we start looking at the pipeline issue...I think the pipeline is one piece of it but in particular the superintendency is also changing. Because I think one time the superintendency was deemed as the middle-aged, white guy position. Because the demographics was that.

**Research Question 2: *What are the similarities and differences of perception of African American superintendents regarding strategies they utilized to overcome the barriers to the superintendency?***

Responses for this question yielded both similarities and differences. One of the emergent themes, *informal networking*, was related directly to this question for all participants.

All of the participants had obtained at least one of their positions in administration and/or the superintendency as a result of recommendations from friends and close professional associates.

Five of the seven participants identified mobility as a strategy they used to obtain the superintendency. Two of those five responses added that the use of this strategy was tied to the state's pension system. One participant stated,

And so that is why I've adopted that philosophy and encouraged people to think about that philosophy; go where the positions are. While you are doing that, while you are going where the positions are, you have to be aware that the pension systems of this country are not interchangeable.

The other participant that connected mobility with the pension system had left NYS for a number of years to serve in a large urban city out of state but decided to come back. This participant commented that,

I also, quite frankly, knew that if I came back to New York it would impact my retirement. Because I left with 29 years, coming back would give me at least 35 years in the system. I felt that that might also be a reason to come back so that I could retire and relax with a stronger pension than I left with.

Another superintendent noted the significance of a willingness to relocate and uproot one's family for a position.

My philosophy, supported by my wife, was you go where the positions are. I have traveled across the country to take positions where they were available and provided an opportunity for economic salary growth, chance of opportunities for me.

Several superintendents spoke directly on the value of informal networking for African American superintendents seeking the superintendent's position. One superintendent explained:

It was informal networking. So no formal agenda, sometimes just to talk to like-minded people to bounce ideas off and that was pretty good. It helped to build a network and when you need some stuff you know where to call and so forth.

Three other strategies were identified by the responses. They were self-confidence, the significance of an advanced degree, and importance of the BOE.

Two participants felt strongly that their leadership skills were key to their attaining the superintendency. They felt that their leadership skills were so strong that they could easily be transferred to any situation. One participant stated:

I think sometimes people fail to realize that it's truly about leadership skills sets and subsequently with people with that skill set and that drive can be effective and that's what she saw and that what she made me realize is that it wasn't necessary about being the curriculum person or coming from a particular path or background, it was truly about who was the best person in the organization to lead the organization. ...And put in that perspective, I couldn't deny the fact that in that situation, at the time I was the person...

While all participants held doctoral degrees, one observed that a doctorate could potentially be a deterrent to obtaining a superintendent position because it may cause others to be intimidated. The strategy discussed was about timing:

...it was a critical decision to make at that point to apply for and be in a position prior to receiving my doctorate. The only reason why, because oftentimes when you are entering a new field; in this case entering the field in New York for the first time as an administrator, sometimes people actually shy away from someone whose credentials are greater than anyone else's within the organization. And so subsequently I thought it was better for me to apply for and have a position prior to having my doctorate so that all of a

sudden the one asset, the doctorate degree, doesn't become a liability because of the potential for people to feel intimidated or otherwise.

**Research Question 3: *What are the similarities and differences of the communities/districts in which the African American superintendents now serve?***

The superintendents that chose to participate in this study were geographically distributed throughout NYS. As stated in the literature review of this study, African American superintendents were primarily selected to lead districts with minority student demographics, as well as those where the communities were chiefly African American in population. This has become the common practice; African Americans are viewed as only being capable of supervising African American districts (Coursen et al., 1989; Horsford, 2009; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Moody, 1973; Scott, 1980; Tallerico, 1999). Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) acknowledged that it was assumed that African American candidates would want to lead districts that were in predominantly African American communities and that school boards would want to match administrator ethnicity with the student ethnicity (p. 4). Data from participants in this study goes against the trends of that literature.

Four of the seven participants served in districts identified as suburban school districts; the other three served in districts identified as urban. Three of the four suburban schools had predominantly White student populations, with the fourth suburban district having a predominantly Hispanic student population. Contrary to the norm for urban districts, one of the urban districts for this study had a predominantly White student population.

Another area of contrast was the social/economic status of the districts led by participants. The NYS Report Cards were reviewed to indicate the free and reduced lunch rates of participants' districts in Table 2 (NYSED, 2011). According to the Report Cards, four of the

seven districts had a free and reduced lunch of 70% or more, while three of the seven districts were at 11% or less. The three districts that were under 11% were districts with predominantly White student populations. However, the one urban district that was predominantly White in student demographics was over 65% in free and reduced lunch data.

Table 2

*Frequency Table of Districts' Free and Reduced Lunch Status*

Lunch Status	Number of Districts
0 – 15%	3
16% – 50%	0
51% – 75%	0
76% – 100%	4

The third area that was reviewed were their districts' student enrollments and grade ranges. See Tables 3 and 4 for student enrollment figures and grade ranges of participants' districts, according to the NYS Report Cards (NYSED, 2011).

Table 3

*Frequency Table of Districts' Grade Level Ranges*

District Grade Levels	Number of Districts
Pre-K to 12	4
K to 12	1
Pre-K to 12	2

This data revealed that in the majority of the districts led by the study participants, four of the seven were Pre-K to 12th grade districts, while one of the seven was a K to 8th grade district. Student enrollment data indicated the range of the districts led by participants was distributed

across small to large. This question confirmed that the participant sample led a heterogeneous mix of districts. This was true of the types of districts, by both enrollments and grade distributions.

Table 4

*Frequency Table of Districts' Student Enrollment Figures*

Student Enrollment	Number of Districts
1 – 300	1
301 – 4000	2
4001 – 5000	2
5001 – 10,000	2

**Research Question 4: *What are the similarities and differences in the background of the African American superintendents in this study?***

The superintendent participants in this study reported four areas of background similarity. These four areas were identified as ethnicity, age range, educational background, and participation in a preparatory program.

When asked about their identified ethnicity, almost all were surprised with the question, yet three of the seven superintendents identified themselves as Caribbean American, while four of the seven identified themselves as African American. One of the superintendents that self-identified as Caribbean American was very clear in their identification and distinguished between African Americans and Caribbean Americans by stating the following:

... the difference between blacks who are of this country and people who are coming to this country is that African Americans...are still living in the place of their enslavement. And there are constant reminders of that and constant structures to keep them

mentally/psychologically in check of that and to some degree...to a large degree they haven't moved away from that.

Superintendents' ages ranged from mid 40's to early 70's, with the average age of participants being 59 years old. Five of the seven superintendents were currently in retirement range, with only two of the seven under 55 years of age. Four of the seven superintendents commented about retirement and their potential of retirement in the next two years or less. One superintendent, who was experiencing some difficulties in the last position, shared how age impacted the decision about options to stay or to leave the position.

I am going to be 62 next year. I was going to retire at the end of this year. And I didn't know if I should really leave but I couldn't stay there. And you have to think about your pension, you've got to think about retiring. Do I let these people run me out? When, if I leave now, I lose everything. And you know at 61 years old you can't be starting over someplace without a decent pension. I don't have 15–20 years left to me.

All seven of the superintendents that participated in this study had obtained their doctorates, yet two of the seven made note that their undergraduate degrees were from Ivy League schools. One participant commented that:

...I think about myself coming for the Ivy League school I didn't get education organizations knocking at my door saying come, come. I got the corporate sector saying hey, you're one of the few black graduates from an Ivy League institution. You can make tons of money in the private sector and so that was a draw.

Four of the seven superintendents had participated in preparatory programs designed for aspiring superintendents. Only two of the four superintendents mentioned that these programs had a real benefit in their pursuit of obtaining a superintendent position. One of the



superintendents felt that the mentoring aspect of their program had helped them immensely, stating:

...he was the person that I probably learned the most from; either watching him and learning about what not to do. Such as maybe me listening to him and understanding what his view of the administration was, learned some of the things that he did well, some other things he didn't do well. And when I became a member of the superintendent's intern program, there were mentors built into the program. I would see him afterwards, after I became a superintendent and had a chance to step into the role...

***Research Question 5: How do the African American superintendents view race as it pertains to attaining superintendent positions in NYS?***

When the seven participants were asked this question directly, all acknowledged race as an important issue in the attainment of a superintendent position. However, their personal views on race varied greatly and were based on age. For the two superintendents who were under 55 years of age, even though they acknowledged that race could be a hindrance, both felt that their leadership skills and competencies outweighed racial biases. Both of these superintendents were currently in predominantly White, affluent school districts. In their responses, they came across as self-assured, with much self-confidence. One of these superintendents stated:

Let the merit of your work speak for your progress. More so than anything else. So I would harp on people to be quite frank with you, instead of complaining about the barrier simply say OK, what are the qualifications I need to get? So therefore, you know what people can't deny me based on the fact that I didn't have something. So that's how I kind of perceive it. But I know of colleagues who have complained that you know they didn't get interviewed because they were this or because they were that. That's very possible. I

mean, I'm not denying that. Because I think when you see people who are really good, people find them. And I would never want someone to hire me simply because of the color of my skin. Ever.

The other superintendent commented about skills and their applicability to superintendent positions:

... I did my good work there, too, wherever I am as I said, bloom where you're planted. I will do good work but I feel right now this is where I should be. This position, the size of the district, the financial support that it has, that they really take academics seriously. I am, I know, an academic elite. I know I am. I can't stand nonsense. I really do believe that no matter where you are, academics is most important. That's your only tool to the future. So, wherever I am, I try to raise the bar.

The other five superintendents possessed views of race from the vantage point of those that have lived with a different reference point regarding race and racism. One of those participants expressed the following view of race as it pertained to the hiring of African Americans in predominantly White districts:

So there it is, whether they say it or not, the reality is that the culture is such that most suburban school districts are going to hire white superintendents. They're not going to hire Blacks. That's been my experience. I think the reality is, if you do an analysis, if you put it in a statistical analysis, you're going to find skill is of any significance.

Another superintendent expressed this view about the hiring of African Americans as superintendents: "Yes, I think there are some boards that will not hire you, districts that will not hire you if you're Black. They will not tell you that but you can tell."

A third superintendent noted that his or her treatment as sitting a superintendent was based on race and not on leadership skills.

And a lot of it was race; a lot of it was ethnicity. And nothing to do with the qualities of me as a leader. So there's an ethnic piece to it, no doubt about it because I have emails where they called me a nigger lover, they told me that I love these monkeys, and I only cared about the monkey savages. And I was ruining the district; I needed to go back to where I came from.

One of the participants observed the following from experiences in dealing with the BOE:

I think it depends upon the community in terms of just personal attitude about diversity. I have been before a board that had been all white and have had very good vibes from them. And I have been before an all African American board... and so you really don't know the underlying race, racial implication. You don't know when you walk in the door; I mean a person could smile... I had a woman once, I never, I always remembered this, and she was a board member, Caucasian, and one of the reasons why she did not support me, she said my handshake wasn't firm enough. And I've never forgotten that. And then I had another situation, where an African American female said that she didn't think I was sincere. And I...so how can you perceive that from an interview?

## **Summary**

This chapter contains the results of this study, with an introduction to the study, demographics of the seven participants, the four emergent themes, and five research questions followed by a chapter summary. The four emergent themes included professional experience, networking and the role of the search consultant, the community and the BOE, and racism.

All seven of the participants spoke of race as an issue permeating their career. Their differences became apparent in both the ways that race had impacted them personally and their responses to it.

## **Chapter V: Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This study focused on seven African American superintendents within NYS, outside of NYC. The purpose of the research was to examine whether or not there were perceived factors that precluded African Americans from the superintendency in NYS. This study explored the personal perspectives and experiences of NYS's African American superintendents, as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position.

As a qualitative, grounded study, the researcher utilized the process of reading and re-reading along with the constant comparison method of analysis. Information and data were derived from interviews with participants. Emerging patterns and themes were revealed through this analysis. What resulted were the findings contained in Chapter IV, expressing the experiences of each superintendent. Each participant, in line with the design of the study, had gained access to the traditionally held, white male dominated position of the superintendency. This researcher's intent was this study might serve as a catalyst for aspiring African Americans educators trying to gain access to the superintendency.

Chapter V contains a summary of the findings, conclusions based on those findings, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future research. The first section includes a summary of the findings, incorporating the meaning and interpretation of the four emergent themes, and the five research questions. The remaining section of this chapter is subdivided into three sections: conclusions, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for future study.

### **Summary of Findings**

The significance of this study was obtaining and analyzing information on the experiences of seven current African American superintendents' successful pursuits and

pathways to the superintendency in NYS. Moody (1973), Scott (1980), and Tallerico (2000b) all emphasized the lack of research on African Americans in the superintendent position. From the data in this grounded qualitative study, four themes emerged: professional experience, networking and the role of the search consultant, the community and the BOE, and racism.

**Professional experience.** All of the participating superintendents expressed the importance of their various professional positions, especially the assistant superintendent position. According to Glass et al. (2000), over 65% of African American superintendents began their careers at the building level as assistant principal. See Table 5 for a summary of participants’ positions. All of the participants began their educational careers as a teacher. Four out of the seven served in staff coordinator and director roles, not line or building-based administrative positions.

Table 5

*Frequency Table of Positions Held During Pathways to the Superintendency*

Position	Number of Participants	Percentage
Teacher	7	100%
Coordinator or Director	4	57%
Assistant Principal	3	43%
Principal	4	57%
Central Office Administrator (other than Assistant Superintendent)	3	43%
Assistant Superintendent	7	100%
Superintendent	7	100%

Four out of the seven superintendents felt that the assistant superintendent position was more beneficial than superintendent preparatory programs. Serving as assistant superintendent

allowed them to be in a better position and have access to move to the next level, the superintendency. One superintendent entered administration at the assistant superintendent position. Only one out of seven participants entered administration at the assistant principal level.

**Networking and the role of the search consultant.** All of the participants acknowledged the importance of networking, but they emphasized informal networking as an essential strategy before and after gaining their superintendent positions. Moody (1983) advised African Americans to network in order to get into positions of power. All seven of the participants shared, in their interviews, how they had obtained administrative positions through an informal network of personal and professional relationships. Two of the seven participants mentioned the *good old boy* network but felt that it had changed over the years and was not as prevalent as in the past. One participant felt that individuals needed to show initiative and make an effort to network through professional affiliations, conferences, and professional development opportunities. Five out of the seven had established relationships with local, regional, and national search consultants. One superintendent stated:

But the search consultant actually called me up and said I have two great jobs for you, your choice. And I told him I didn't want either one of them. I have a great job. And you know at his urging as well as the urgings of other folks that said, hey take a look at this and see what you think, you know. ...I was a finalist at one and subsequently ended up here at my present position.

**The community and the board of education.** All seven participants acknowledged the role of the BOE and the importance in knowing the political and cultural dynamics of the community. Most of the literature addressed the role of the BOE in the hiring process and the

composition of the BOE in relationship to their community. Kamler (2009) discussed the composition of boards and how "...they get burned out and are there many more one issue candidates, with less and less professionals coming onto boards" (p. 29). These were some of the issues and concerns that the superintendents shared, stressing the importance of candidates knowing the dynamics of the BOE and the community. Regardless of the racial demographics of a district, the majority of the participants regarded compatibility of the superintendent to the BOE and the community as vitally important. One superintendent stated:

Many a time every single one of them is on a different page, if you're not careful in terms of what they want you to accomplish. And you'll find yourself sometimes running around like a chicken without a head trying to either appease or being strong enough to say no, you're one member of the board and I will not do this because quite frankly it is not a reflection of what all board members want. And when you engage in that type of communication it leads to differences, it leads sometimes to attitudinal challenges, etc. So the boards that I've dealt with...one of the things that I have to confess I look for is acumen on the part of the board members. What they do is important; I don't care what anybody tells you. If they're unemployed, and when I say unemployed, I don't mean because you just lost your job and hard times, I mean unemployed and you've been unemployed forever. If they're quasi managers with no flock, you get what I'm saying.

Much of the literature indicated that African Americans were typically hired only in troubled districts with a predominantly nonminority student population (Moody, 1983). Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) stated the following:

...because urban districts are beset with problems, those with other options took them, leaving administrative openings to African descent or other minority candidates. An



additional explanation assumed that African descent candidates would want to lead districts that were of predominantly African descent and that it was logical for school boards to match administrator ethnicity with the student body ethnicity. The often double-edged sword was that only an African descent administrator is qualified for an African descent school district or on the other hand, an African descent administrator is only qualified to lead an African descent school district. (p. 4)

Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) also indicated, “In New York State in 2000, all African American superintendents were employed in predominantly minority districts” (p. 4). In 2010, six of the 19 African American superintendents in NYS were heading predominantly White school districts, with one leading a predominantly Hispanic district. Four of the seven participants in this study were currently serving in districts with predominantly White student populations, with one superintendent serving in a district with a predominantly Hispanic student population.

One of the superintendents commented directly about their experience regarding being targeted for African American districts by search consultants,

...they have their stable and they decide. If I had wanted to be a superintendent I definitely would not have used them because my background and who I am and who...what I stand for would not fit in where they would want me to be put. You know. They would probably wait for Hempstead to open up to ask me to... So they don't give you the districts where you can shine. So If I had been someplace else, I would be worrying about suspensions and discipline and worrying about budgets and worrying about things...

**Racism.** Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) stated the following on race and racism:

The effects of race and racism in education are real. Racial attitudes weigh heavy on the choices that African Americans have when seeking superintendencies...whether they are the attitudes held by those who hire or the beliefs of applicants about which openings are available to an African descent candidate. (p. 4)

All of the participating superintendents stated that racism had an impact on their ascension to the superintendency. Bell (1992) stated, "...racism is a permanent component of American life" (p. 13). Each of the superintendents shared experiences with racism. Their perspectives of racism demonstrated how CRT is so prevalent in our society. Horsford (2009) viewed CRT through a theoretical lens, stating, "it reveals how race and racism work to maintain hierarchies, allocate resources and distribute power in educational practices, processes and institutions" (p. 175).

Based on their experiences, these superintendents shed light on how they overcame this real barrier to the superintendency. One superintendent explained:

...the issue of race comes first as to how do we change the larger microcosm of Blacks in America, how do we change the context by demonstrating more and more competent folks ...we can in fact achieve things at a greater level to hopefully promote that sense of drive and ambition knowing that you will face challenges, you will probably have more barriers because you are playing a game, so to speak, that the rules of that engagement weren't necessarily defined from your perspective initially. But those rules are very doable once you understand the rules of engagement. ...it's a struggle when you see people who think that entitlement applies to all, but entitlement doesn't. And some people have benefitted from the entitlement of race, but don't bank on it. At all. You

know. It's simple, you know at the end of the day you may not like me but you can say that I wasn't effective?

## **Research Questions Results**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether or not there were perceived factors that precluded African Americans from the superintendency in NYS. This study explored the personal perspectives and experiences of seven of NYS's African American superintendents through qualitative, grounded research, as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position. Following are the results by research question.

### **Research Question 1: *What are the similarities and differences of perception regarding barriers to the superintendency that exist among the African American superintendents?***

One of the more prevalent barriers from the literature contends that African Americans are geared toward urban, African American student populated districts (Coursen et al., 1989; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Tallerico, 2000a). Yet, when asked this question directly, none of the participants identified this as a direct barrier. Each of the seven participants had different perceptions of what had been barriers for them during their pathway to the superintendency. The following barriers were identified: perception of self, the role of the search consultants to gender bias, the *pipeline*, and issues of race. Their personal experiences dictated what they identified as barriers. One of the female superintendents shared this perspective:

They would make assumptions, is she tough enough? But they would be looking at my height and how I looked. And that has nothing to do with my ability as a manager or as an educator. You know, so those things...whether you think they had played a part of not, but they do.

**Research Question 2: *What are the similarities and differences of perception of African American superintendents regarding strategies they utilized to overcome the barriers to the superintendency?***

All seven participants agreed on one strategy as the most effective. Networking was identified as the strategy to overcome barriers to ascending the superintendency. These findings support Hudson's (1994) research, which found that minority school superintendents (70.6%) stated that they had used informal contacts extensively to find and obtain their positions in majority African American student population and African American school board members (p. 390). Hudson concluded that African Americans were not as likely to be hired in nonminority districts if they did not have "strong informal professional ties" (p. 391). This was an important finding in this study.

**Research Question 3: *What are the similarities and differences of the communities/districts in which the African American superintendents now serve?***

Moody (1973) stated that African American superintendents were found chiefly in minority school districts. This study was limited, and only represents 38.8% of the African American superintendents in NYS. However, with this sample, four of the seven participants (57%) were currently serving predominantly White student populated districts. In 2000, all 20 of the African American superintendents in NYS were serving in minority student populated districts (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). In 2010, there were 18 African American superintendents and 6 were serving in predominantly White student populated districts (NYSED, 2011). This is a marked increase of African American superintendents leading predominantly White districts.

**Research Question 4: *What are the similarities and differences in the background of the African American superintendents in this study?***

All of the superintendents had obtained a doctorate degree. This was consistent with the literature. Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) reported that African Americans “placed a higher premium on the doctorate... They assumed that the doctorate would open doors and invite interviews” (p. 15). One participating superintendent reported that they felt that they needed to have their doctorate out of the way, so that it would already be an asset for them in advancing their careers.

Another finding from the interviews dealt the age demographics of the participating superintendents. This researcher found that the two superintendents that were under 55 years of age had different perspectives on how they viewed race and its impact on their careers from their older peers, who were, on average, 15 years older. This is also discussed in the next research question, which will deal with race.

**Research Question 5: *How do the African American superintendents view race as it pertains to attaining superintendent positions in NYS?***

As previously reported in Chapter IV, two of the seven superintendents were less than 55 years of age. Though they acknowledged that race could be a hindrance, they both felt that their leadership skills and competencies outweighed racial biases. Those two participants viewed race as more of an obstacle that could, and would, be removed. They possessed similarities in their background, both attending Ivy League schools for their undergraduate degree, and both identified Caribbean American in their ethnicity. The other five participants all reported that race/racism had impact on their ascension to the superintendency, yet their strategies for dealing with racism varied based on their own personal experiences.

## **Conclusions**

This study was limited to seven African American superintendents who were currently serving as superintendents in NYS. The results of this study reflect only the experiences, views, and perceptions of those seven African American superintendents. Nevertheless, this study contributes a better understanding of the contexts of how African American superintendents obtain their coveted positions. The intent for this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning African Americans in the White, male-dominated educational position of superintendent. The findings revealed that African Americans encountered race and racism as they sought the position of the superintendency.

All of the participants obtained at least one of their administrative positions as a result of recommendations from friends and close professional associates. The findings from this study demonstrate the importance that networking has on the ascension to the superintendency for African American superintendents.

African American superintendents were viewed to only be able to lead predominantly African American school districts, which was the trend in NYS in 2000 with all 20 of the African American superintendents. In 2010, though the number of serving African American superintendents had dropped, six of the seventeen African American superintendents were leading predominantly White populated school districts.

All seven participants served as an assistant superintendent/deputy superintendent position. Tallerico (2000b) found "...that the gates are typically open widest for candidates with prior experience as superintendents, assistant superintendents, or high school principals" (p. 29). All of the participants expressed that their experiences and duties as assistant superintendents gave them true insight into the superintendency.

All of the superintendents acknowledged that they had encountered issues of race and racism in the pursuit of the superintendency. However, this study's findings showed that those issues of race or racism were experienced differently for each of the participants. What became evident in the findings was that how they perceived racism and their reaction to it was connected to their age, experiences, and personal backgrounds. The two African American superintendents who were less than 55 years in age viewed race and racism as a hindrance that could be combated by competency and great leadership skills.

This researcher has a better understanding of the existence of race and racism in attaining the superintendency and how both will impact the opportunities that aspiring African American educators have in pursuit of the superintendency. This study was undertaken to provide African Americans aspiring to the superintendency with research from the voices of experienced African American superintendents. The data gathered could serve as a guide for those following in participants' footsteps. The researcher herself benefited from the wisdom of her elders, as they spoke of race and racism and its impact on their careers.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

After interviewing the seven superintendents, several implications for practice emerged from this study. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are provided.

**Recommendation 1: *Networking is critical for aspiring African American superintendents.*** Aspiring African Americans superintendents must learn to develop a professional and personal network of contacts. The participants maximized the use of networking. The superintendents in this study demonstrated how their professional and personal contacts aided their ability to obtain administration positions at several different points in their

careers. Developing effective networking skills will help aspiring African American superintendents ascend to the superintendency.

**Recommendation 2: *It is essential that aspiring African Americans research potential districts and communities as they apply for administrative positions.*** As aspiring African American superintendents apply for superintendent positions, they will need to research the demographics, culture, and needs of the district, community, and BOE. The superintendents in this study stated that gaining this information helps to ensure that there will be compatibility with the skills they are able to bring to a position and the needs of the district. Each superintendent in this study emphasized the importance of knowing the needs of the community and the dynamics of the BOE.

**Recommendation 3: *Aspiring African American superintendents must anticipate and prepare for encounters with racism as they seek positions of the superintendency.*** Each of the participants in this study encountered racism and racial situations as they moved through their educational careers. All seven of the participating superintendents in this study shared their experiences with racism and how they dealt with racism as they ascended to the superintendency. Aspiring African American superintendents need to be prepared to deal with difficult racial situations that can arise.

**Recommendation 4: *Search consultants need to actively seek to widen their pool of potential candidates by reaching out to African American educators.*** Three of the seven superintendents mentioned the importance of the role of the search consultants in pursuing a superintendent position. Each of them had established relationships with search consultants, which enabled them to be known candidates as superintendent positions become available. As aspiring African American superintendents establish a line of communication and build



relationships with search consultants, search consultants need to actively seek out African American candidates and establish relationships to be able to place the best candidates in the best positions.

**Recommendation 5: *Professional educational associations need to develop an aggressive development program for aspiring African American educators.*** All seven of the participants stated the importance of networking, noting the importance of their affiliations in gaining access to the superintendency. These affiliations allowed them to network with other administrators and superintendents, giving them many opportunities to advance their career. Professional educational associations need to be inclusive and expand their membership pool to include under-represented African American educators.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

The seven superintendents that participated in this study were able to give answers to several questions about their experiences and perspectives as African American superintendents who sought and obtained the superintendency. This study provided the superintendents with a voice to tell how they overcame barriers to become superintendents. Recommendations for future research have emerged as a result of this study. Future researchers may consider exploring or investigating several topics suggested. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided.

1. It is recommended that there be a study done on the school boards that hired African American superintendents. Those school boards could give some insight into why they hired an African American and how the factor of race impacted the hiring process.

2. It is recommended that future research should replicate this study as a quantitative study with a larger population across multiple states.
3. It is recommended that future research should be conducted on more African American superintendents who lead predominantly White school districts outside of NYS. Such research could provide more information about their experiences and perspectives in obtaining the superintendency.
4. It is recommended that future research should be done with African American superintendents to build knowledge regarding the nature and use of informal networking as the key to accessing knowledge about positions and the superintendency. By studying these aspects of networking, information can be gathered on how these networks aid African Americans in obtaining educational positions.

### **Summary**

After reviewing the literature and the findings from this study on African American superintendents, it is this researcher's opinion that additional research is needed in many areas. Aspiring African American educators could greatly benefit from the potential valuable information. With the information gained from this study, it is the hope of this researcher that it could lead to more African American ascending to the superintendency.

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*Appendix A*  
Introduction Letter

XXXXXXXX Superintendent

XXXXXXXX School District

Dear Superintendent:

I am a doctoral candidate at The Sage Colleges in Albany, New York, working on my dissertation in the Department of Educational Leadership. This letter is to seek your participation in my research study.

The purpose of the qualitative grounded study will be to discover whether or not there are perceived factors that preclude African Americans from the superintendency in New York State. This study intends to explore the current African American superintendents personal perspective and experiences as well as the barriers and obstacles encountered as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position. As an African American who aspires to become a superintendent, I am seeking your voluntary participation in my research study.

The current African American superintendents in New York State, excluding New York City, are being invited to participate in this study. The information gathered will be studied and reviewed to provide insight into the under-representation of African American superintendents in New York State. The researcher will review the narratives for common patterns and themes that may emerge.

The interview will be approximately sixty to ninety minutes and with your approval, be audio taped. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed for examining and coding. Strict procedures will be utilized by the researcher to protect the participants in the study. You will have the freedom to schedule the time, date, and location of the interview and taping will be stopped at any time that you feel necessary. Any questions that make you uncomfortable can be skipped in the interview. The researcher will control against the minimal risks of personal identifiable data being revealed by several strategies. Transcripts of your interview will be available to you so that you can confirm the accuracy of the transcript. You will also be assured of confidentiality in this study, as a pseudonym will be used for the school district as well as for each participant.

I will contact you by phone in a few days to determine your willingness to participate in this very important study. If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the enclosed forms and return them to me.

Questions or concerns regarding this research may be directed to:

Kimberly Young Wilkins  
[address]  
Albany, New York 12208  
(518) xxx-xxxx  
xxxxxxx@sage.edu

Dr. Ann Myers  
The Sages Colleges  
Albany, New York 12208  
(518) xxx-xxxx  
xxxxxxx@sage.edu

Thank you for your consideration,  
Kimberly Young Wilkins

*Appendix B*  
Informed Consent Document

School of Educational Leadership  
Principal Investigator, Dr. Ann Myers  
Student Investigator, Kimberly Young Wilkins  
*A Study of New York State African American Superintendents: Their Pathway to the Superintendency*

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled “A Study of New York State African American Superintendents: Their Pathway to the Superintendency”. Kimberly Young Wilkins, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at The Sages Colleges, under the direction of Dr. Ann Myers, her dissertation chair, is conducting the study.

The purpose of this study will be to discover whether or not there are perceived factors that preclude African Americans from the superintendency in New York State, excluding New York City. This study intends to explore the personal perspectives and experiences of New York State’s African American superintendents. It will also explore the barriers and obstacles that African American superintendents encountered as they sought and successfully attained the superintendent position. If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed for between sixty and ninety minutes. Audio equipment will be used to ensure accuracy of the information and written transcripts of all interviews will be created. At any time during the interview, you may request for the audio recorder to be turned off.

If you have any questions about the study prior or during the study, I will be more than please to accommodate these questions or concerns. The data will be coded and categorized into patterns as the primary basis for organizing and reporting results. The risk associated with involvement in this study although minimal include that personal identifiable information could be disclosed. In order to minimize these potential risks, the confidentiality of all participants will be maintained with the utmost care. All of the information collected from the interviews will be confidential. Your name and other identifying features will not be used in analysis of the research. The information from the data will be confidential, which will be done by identifying you by the use of a pseudonym such as “Superintendent A”, “Superintendent B” and so on.

The transcribed responses will be reviewed by you and the student investigator for verification and accuracy. All recordings of your interview will be destroyed once they have

been transcribed and your assurance of the student investigator accuracy of your responses. You may refuse to participate/ terminate the interview or your participation in the study without prejudice or penalty. If you do chose to participate in the study, you may choose to skip any questions you rather not answer.

In event that you are harmed in the participation of the study, you understand that compensation and/or medical treatment is not available from The Sage Colleges. However, compensation and/or medical cost could be recovered by legal action.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Kimberly Young Wilkins at (518) xxx-xxxx, xxxxxxx@sage.edu or Dr. Ann Myers at (518) xxx-xxxx, xxxxxx@sage.e.du This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you, as a participant, have any complaints about this study, please contact:

Dr. Esther Haskvitz, Interim Dean  
Sage Graduate Schools  
School of Health Sciences  
65 First Street  
Troy, New York 12180  
518-244-2264  
xxxxxx@sage.edu

Your signature below indicates that you have read an/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Consent obtained by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Initials of the Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*Appendix C*  
Interview Guide for Superintendents (April – July 2011)

- 1. Warm up question (three to five minutes):**
  - a. Could you tell me some information about your background and your education?
- 2. How long have you been in education?**
  - a. What positions have you held in education?
- 3. Describe your preparation for the superintendency.**
- 4. How many superintendent positions have you held?**
  - a. How many superintendent positions have you applied prior to being selected for a position?
  - b. How many positions have you been a finalists for the superintendent position?
  - c. How long have you been in your current superintendent position?
- 5. What kind of districts have you applied to more frequently: urban, suburban, rural, small city? Why?**
  - a. What were some of the factors that attracted you to apply for certain positions?
  - b. What were some of the factors that prevented you from applying to? certain positions?
  - c. What factors motivated you to accept your current superintendent position?
  - d. In what states have you primarily worked?
  - e. Have you been willing to move to accept a position if offered one? Why or why not?
- 6. Have you used consultants to apply for superintendent's positions?**
  - a. Have you ever been recruited for a superintendent's position?
  - b. How did (do) you learn about superintendent openings?
- 7. What was the hiring process for the superintendent position in your current district?**
  - a. What has been the role of the school board in the selection process in districts where you have that you have applied?
- 8. Did you have a mentor prior to the superintendency and during your tenure as a superintendent?**

- a. What role has a networking played in your applying for and attaining of a superintendent position?
  - b. How were you encouraged to seek the superintendency?
  - c. Were there any administrators that mentored you? If so, how?
  - d. Are you currently mentoring any aspiring educational administrators?
  - e. What professional organizations are you affiliated with?
- 9. As an African American do you perceive there to be any barriers that have impacted your ability to obtain a superintendent's position?**
- a. What is the racial/ethnic and gender make up of your board at the time of your hiring to your current superintendent position?
  - b. Do you perceive there to be any barriers that have impacted your ability to obtain a superintendent's position as an African American?
- 10. How do you think race has impacted your ability to obtain and maintain a superintendent position?**
- a. Why do you think that there are so few African American superintendents in New York State?
- 11. Brief Demographics:**
- a. Age Range
    - i. 25 – 35
    - ii. 36 – 45
    - iii. 46 – 55
    - iv. 56 – 65
    - v. 66 – 76
  - b. Ethnicity
  - c. Marital Status
  - d. State of Primary Residence
- 12. Do you have any additional information that you would like to share?**



*Appendix D*  
Codebook

**1. Professional background of the interviewee**

- a. Length of time in education
- b. Colleges/Programs attended
  - i. College – area of certification
  - ii. Preparatory Programs
- c. Post Graduated degrees

**2. Positions held in education**

- a. Number of positions held prior to the superintendency
- b. Positional pathways to the superintendency

**3. Role of an administrative preparatory program**

- a. Name and description of administrative program
  - i. Application process
  - ii. Experiences of the program
  - iii. Role of peer relationships
  - iv. Role of mentors
  - v. Role of program after completion

**4. Types of districts applied to: Suburban, Urban or Rural**

- a. Reasons for applying to a particular type of district
  - i. Personal experiences
  - ii. Personal values or preference
- b. Personal research of district demographics
  - i. Need to know the cultural behavior of the district (especially in an African American district)
- c. Mobility - local, regional, state

- i. Willingness to relocate
- ii. State or regional preferences
- iii. State pension systems

**5. Factors that prevented applying to certain districts**

- a. Bias or perception of districts toward African American candidates
- b. Bias or perception of superintendents toward districts
- c. Disadvantages of urban districts
  - i. Difficulties of an African American superintendent working in an African American district
- d. Personal preference for urban districts

**6. Application Process for positions**

- a. Knowledge of administrative openings or positions
  - i. Personal/professional associates
  - ii. In- District knowledge
  - iii. Search consultants
  - iv. Professional ads
- b. Invitation to apply for positions
  - i. In-District
  - ii. Personal/professional associates
  - iii. Search consultants
- c. Interview process
  - i. Personal experiences

**7. The role networking to gain access to administrative positions**

- a. Professional/ Personal affiliations
- b. Networking with search consultants personally
- c. Affiliation with Professional Organizations

- i. Actively participating in conferences
  - d. Importance of networking
    - i. Informal networking amongst African American superintendents
    - ii. Need to network with superintendents, District superintendents, they tend to become search consultants
  - e. The “old boy “network

**8. Use of search consultants by majority of the districts**

- a. Search consultants used as a filter for the BOE
  - i. Use of a “stable” of viable candidates that they favor
  - ii. The pool of viable candidates
  - iii. “Black listing” by search consultants of African American aspiring administrative leaders
  - iv. African American candidates geared toward African American districts by search consultants
- b. Majority of the search consultants are former superintendent, and are White males

**9. The importance of the BOE and the role of the BOE in selection process**

- a. BOE controls the process; they have the final word on the selection
- b. Dysfunctional BOE’s
- c. Make-up of the BOE - demographics
- d. Need to be concern with the changes to the BOE, especially elections
- e. BOE members with personal agendas
  - i. Many variables when dealing with BOE’s
- f. Critical to your success as a superintendent
- g. Importance of knowing the political environment of a district or region

**10. Availability of a mentor during pursuit of superintendency**

- a. Formal mentoring through preparatory programs

- b. Informal mentoring, non-traditional

### **11. Perceived barriers to the superintendency**

- a. Racism
  - i. Personal experiences
  - ii. Hate email sent to African American superintendents
  - iii. Witnessing discriminatory treatment of Black administrators versus White administrators
  - iv. Perception of community bias/ District's wants "good people"
  - v. Perceived racism versus real barriers
  - vi. Position of merit
  - vii. The "glass ceiling" in administrative ranks for leadership position

### **12. Demographics of the District's community**

- a. Understanding the culture of a community
- b. Understanding the needs of the district
- c. Need to know what districts are looking for in a leader

### **13. The "Pipeline"**

- a. Who is actually in the "pipeline"
- b. Positions held in districts

### **14. Personal experiences of gender bias**

- a. Concern with perception of women in regional areas
- b. Perception of women in the superintendency
  - i. Their ability to do the job

### **15. Self-awareness of personal leadership skills**

- a. Knowing personal strengths and weakness
- b. Self perception on self-esteem about personal characteristics and background