

**CAREER PATHWAYS AND PERCEPTIONS OF EXPERIENCES THAT INFLUENCED  
THE ATTAINMENT OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY**

**A Doctoral Research Project  
Presented to  
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Doctoral Research Committee Chair  
School of Education  
The Sage Colleges**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education  
In Educational Leadership**

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**September 2009**

## Acknowledgments

There were many people who gave me their support during my doctoral journey. Thank you to my chair, Dr. James Butterworth for his guidance and deep level of commitment to me as a researcher. His guidance, availability and knowledge helped support my endeavors at so many different levels. My thanks also go to my committee members, Dr. Suzanne Gilmour and Dr. Connell Frazer who provided me with supportive feedback and guidance through the many challenges of the research process. Additional appreciated is given to Dr. Raymond O'Connell, Dr. Daniel Alemu and Dr. Ann Myers for their optimism and confidence in me as an educational leader.

I am grateful to Dr. Raymond Coluceillo, my executive coach. Thank you for how you molded me as a leader supported me as a mentor and how you gave me the "straight" talk when I most needed guidance. I truly appreciated the help, love and support that came from my Harmony Hill friends! A journey that will stay in my heart for the rest of my life and be my guiding light for what a magical school for students looks like. I must mention Louise Jarosz and Mary Rumsey who told me every day, "You can do this!" and gave me the emotional support to do it.

Thank you to Cohort One – truly a group of educational leaders who will make an impact and a difference in education at many different levels with a focus on children. I would like to acknowledge and thank all of the participants in the study who graciously volunteered their time, shared their stories and during their journey make a difference in their schools as systems leaders.

Above all, I would like to acknowledge and thank my wonderful daughter and husband who lived without me for over two years. Thank you for your love, support and patience and especially for taking care of our lives while I accomplished my dream. Always dream big!

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the phenomenon of career pathways of public school superintendents in the Greater Capital Region of New York State. The study explored the career pathways of sixteen superintendents and their perceptions of their career pathways and experiences that influenced attainment of the superintendency. This study was guided by the following primary research questions: What were the career pathways of the superintendents? What were the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency? The exploration of career pathways and perceptions of experiences that influenced attainment of the superintendency were examined utilizing the factor of years of service and gender. Career pathways findings revealed that superintendents followed a career pathway that included teaching, building level position and central office experience before obtaining the position of superintendent. Findings revealed that superintendents' experiences must be vast and diverse to prepare system leaders for success. The experiences in the position of assistant superintendent was most noted by participants as being the most valued position in which to gain knowledge and experience as a system leader. The findings indicated that the perspectives of both males and females were similar concerning experiences and skill set deemed most valued by participants. This included experiences in communication, relationships, instructional leadership, management of budget, deep understanding of how "politics" work and awareness of legislative issues. Factors that influenced attainment included skill set development, the concept of "fit" to the district and the roles of mentors during the career pathway and in some cases, for women, the approval and guidance of an influential male.

Key words: career pathway, superintendents' perceptions, gender

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, school district leadership has increasingly become a focus of interest. “Compelling arguments for improving classroom instruction and fundamentally altering the manner in which schools are structured, managed, and governed not only challenged conventional assumptions about the nature of schooling, but also increased awareness of the importance of school and district leadership” (Bjork, 2000, p. 5). Many educational associations and researchers report a crisis of leadership in education. Glass (2001) surveyed thirty-seven chief state school officers and seventy-three executive directors of state affiliates of the National School Boards Association and American Association of School Administrators and reported the following: a superintendent applicant crisis exists in all parts of the nation, and is particularly acute in rural and poor districts; the quality of applicants is decreasing; and half of current superintendents will retire within the next five to seven years. This situation has supported the need for further research to explore the career pathways of superintendents and the factors that influence access to the superintendency.

The challenges of the superintendency, together with the increasing number of vacancies make it important to examine current career pathways. The superintendency is the executive level leader in the public school system. This person is usually appointed by a board of education with five or more elected individuals from the school community after extensive interviews with stakeholder groups such as teachers, staff, parents, community members, unions and administrative personnel. The superintendent is the chief officer for all aspects of the school community, which include developing and maintaining an effective school and district staff, facilities planning, fiscal and legal responsibilities, maintaining strong relationships with the



Board of Education, political representatives and the public, professional development and instituting mandates and accountability standards for the education system for the community (Glass, Bjork & Brunner, 2000; Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Terranova & Volp, 2007).

The changing expectations and demographics of education over the last five years have affected the role of the superintendency. The New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) has conducted a study every three years since 1991, which has captured a “snapshot” of the position of the chief school officer. New York State has approximately 720 superintendents who are responsible for educating the vast majority of the children of the state to the level mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the accountability standards set by the Board of Regents and the Commissioner of New York State. *Snapshot VI* (2006) found that 60 percent of the responding superintendents plan to retire by 2011. This places a premium on discovering the factors that both encourage and discourage qualified candidates from seeking the position of school superintendent.

“The popular perception of the superintendency is one of an impossible job few want to undertake, where even the best and the brightest confront escalating and competing demands, find themselves besieged by confusing and conflicting interest groups, and enjoy little or no job security” (Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000, p. 8). Utilizing the SPEARS (Superintendents’ Professional Expectations and Advancement Review) questionnaire, they examined the skill set required for success. The skill set included interpersonal communication and human relation skills, community relations, management of finance and budget, facilities planning, personnel, labor issues, race relations, curriculum design, instruction, professional development, and technology. These findings represent national data that reflect the current state of the superintendency.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to explore career pathways of public school superintendents from the Greater Capital Region of New York State and their perception of experiences that influenced their pathway. Career pathway was defined by Glass (1993) as “a sequence of positions and experiences [that] tend to occur in a logical and ordered progression of positions of increasing responsibility and complexity” (p. 30). This phenomenological study utilized a convenience sample of new and veteran superintendents from the Greater Capital Region to identify career pathways and perceptions of experiences that influenced pathways to the superintendency.

Focus groups were created based on gender and years of experience in the superintendency. The criteria established identified “new” participants as those superintendents who were in their first superintendency and had two or less years experience as a superintendent. “Veteran” participants were superintendents with eight or more years experience as a superintendent. Participants completed a questionnaire to document critical demographic information, the career pathway to the position of superintendent, and educational experiences. Participants engaged in one focus group interview to discuss experiences that influenced their career pathway. Focus group participants were asked sixteen questions to encourage dialogue about their experiences and perceptions. The study examined similarities and differences among participant groups. Four categories for focus groups were established and five focus group interviews were conducted due to scheduling issues of the participants. Four of the focus group interviews were conducted in regional Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) centers. In New York State, BOCES provide regional educational support services to school districts and are located within a geographic location. One focus group interview was conducted

in a local school district central administrative conference room for the convenience of the participants.

### *Research Questions*

This study examined the career pathways and the perceptions of the participants of the experiences that influenced their pathway. This study utilized the following research questions to guide the exploration:

1. What were the career pathways of the superintendents?
2. What were the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency?

The following questions guided the study:

1. What were the career pathways of new and veteran superintendents?
2. What were the perceptions and experiences of new and veteran superintendents?
3. What were the perceptions and experiences of male and female superintendents?

### *Description of the Study*

Using a phenomenological approach, data were collected through use of a questionnaire, focus group interviews and a follow up reflection questionnaire. A comprehensive interview protocol was established to ensure that all focus groups were conducted in the same manner. Pre-determined semi-structured questions were asked in each focus group. Focus group interviews were audio and video-taped and transcribed. All transcriptions were verified by the researcher for accuracy through a review of the videotapes. Data collected from the questionnaire and the reflections were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet for reporting purposes. Transcriptions were organized, coded, and analyzed to determine themes and sub themes emerging inductively from the collected data. Codes were developed based on the

emerging themes and information collected from participants. A codebook of emerging themes and subthemes was established. All transcriptions were transferred to NVivo8. Codes were established in parent and child nodes utilizing the codebook. The researcher crosschecked the codes for validity through multiple coding of the same transcription to ensure consistent coding of themes. An external expert verified codes and coding method.

### *Limitations*

The following limitations should be considered for this study. The sample size of eighteen superintendents (current and retired) was purposefully selected and utilized a convenience sample. Two participants were unable to attend the scheduled focus group interviews due to district emergencies and the information was not included in the study. The generalization of the study is limited due to geographic location and characteristics of sample. The researcher bias may be that she is female and currently in a central office position in a Capital Region district.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of the relevant literature focused on career pathways and factors that affect access to the superintendency.

“The school superintendency, now over 150 years old, has grown in importance as public education has expanded in scope, size, and accomplishments; in complexity as education has taken on more and more functions; and in political exposure and vulnerability as education is increasingly scrutinized by courts, governments, and attentive public;” (Cooper, Fusarelli & Carella, 2000, p. 40).

The role of superintendent has become much more concerned with conflict management and declining community and state resources. Distribution of limited resources to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students is a major fiscal challenge for superintendents (Browne-Ferrigno & Glass, 2005). Historical findings related to career pathways were explored, with a focus on factors that influence access to the position of superintendent.

The *2000 Study of the American School Superintendency* was the ninth national study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). The study was a comprehensive survey conducted by Glass, Bjork & Brunner (2000). In April 1999, survey instruments were mailed to an over-sampled group of 5,336 superintendents throughout the United States. The number of usable surveys was 2,262 for a return rate of 42.4 percent. The AASA study described information on the superintendency including demographic characteristics, relationships with board members, superintendents’ opinions on key problems and issues, participation of women and minorities in the superintendency, and superintendents’ professional and career patterns.

The data from the AASA study indicated “The American school superintendency, like many other high-profile executive leadership positions in the public and private sector is dominated by white males” (p. 16). Most superintendents are married, white, male, of middle age, come from small towns, have advanced degrees in educational administration, and, for the most part, share common values and opinions (Glass et al., 2000; Hodgkinson and Montenegro, 1999; Johnson, 1996). The AASA study indicates superintendents were white (94.4%), male (86.6%), and married (97.6% male and 76.9% female). The average age of superintendents was 52.5, which was an increase of two years from the 1992 study. The number of female superintendents increased from 6.6 percent in 1992, to 13.2 percent in 2000. The number of minority superintendents increased slightly from 3.9 percent in 1992 to 5.1 percent in 2000.

According to the most recent study conducted by the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), *Snapshot 2006: The 6th Triennial Study of the Superintendency in New York (2006)*, the mean age of chief school officers was 54.6 years overall, with women (55.3 years) slightly older than men (54.3 yrs). This was an increase from a mean age of 49.7 years in 1991. Superintendents of both genders were taking their first superintendency later in life with men entering the position at a mean age of 44.7 years and women at a mean age of 49.7 years. “The aging of the superintendency appears likely to continue, driven by the increasing age of new superintendents generally and the increasing proportion of those new superintendents who were women (who enter the superintendency even later in life than men)” (*Snapshot, 2006*, p. 19).

#### *Career Pathways*

Educators have taken various career paths to the superintendency. According to the 2000 AASA study (Glass et al., 2000), the most common career path superintendents followed was

from teacher to assistant principal or principal to central office administrator to superintendent (48.5%). The second most prevalent pathway was from teacher to assistant principal or principal to superintendent (31.2%). The first career path was most common in large urban districts with large student enrollment where several central office positions with varying responsibilities were available. The second career path was more common in smaller and rural districts where there were very limited central office positions available. Glass et al. (2000) noted that various factors influenced the pathways taken by superintendents. These factors included educational experiences, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, supports such as mentoring, barriers, social constructs and political issues.

Bjork, Glass & Brunner (2005) reported that superintendents began their career paths as teachers at age 23, taught eight years, and then 84% attained a position as either an assistant principal or principal between the ages of 25-35. Some 9% of them moved to central office positions in their late thirties. Most entered the superintendency in their early to mid-forties, serving in this position in 2-3 districts spanning between 15-18 years. Glass et al. (2000) found that more than 68% of superintendents were hired from outside their present district, although 88% spend their education career in one state.

Historically, few superintendents deviate from the traditional pathway to the position of superintendent. Ortiz (1982) notes "The line positions such as principal, assistant, associate, and deputy superintendent are positions which allow an individual to engage in activities which develop technical skills, such as school budgeting, and interpersonal skills, such as personnel administration." (p. 147). Most individuals do not aspire to become school superintendents until mid-career.

The valuable experience of teaching for many years in public education classrooms is considered the gateway for most school administrators. In a study conducted by Draper and McMichael (2000), the researchers surveyed 100 principal teachers (department heads) and 69 assistant head teachers in 50 Scottish secondary schools to examine their career identities and intentions to seek promotion. The researchers proposed a typology of teaching career strategies in which teachers were categorized as “stayers,” (not seeking promotion), “stoppers,” “movers” (desiring promotion) and “starters.” Some teachers were reluctant to move into administrative roles and lose their day-to-day interactions with children; however, other teachers sought to have more impact on the educational system. Spear, Gould & Lee (2000) suggest some teachers seek promotion to an administrative position based on their desire to broaden their experiences, increase their impact on improving education; and may be motivated by increased compensation. Female superintendents, on average, spend a longer time as classroom teachers than do male superintendents. In the 2000 AASA study (Glass et al., 2000), 60% of female superintendents spent at least ten years in the classroom and 40% of male superintendents spent about five years as teachers.

In *Accessing the Superintendency: The Unwritten Rules* by Tallerico (2000), there were key variables that affected experience and progression through the positions, including size of school district, and/or administrative unit, and type of community such as rural, suburban, or urban. Tallerico (2000) drew upon two principal sources of information. One source was a comprehensive review of literature and research relevant to the topics of (a) the superintendency, (b) search and selection practices, and (c) issues of gender and race/ethnicity in educational administration. The other source of data was an in-depth case study of superintendent search and selection practices in the State of New York (Tallerico, 2000). Qualitative procedures were used



to collect data, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analyses over a two year period, 1996 to 1998. Seventy-five persons from New York State, excluding New York City, were interviewed, including 25 headhunters, 25 school board members, and 25 recent applicants for superintendent positions. The participants were purposefully selected with consideration of region of state, gender, ethnicity and established criteria. The case study drew upon the experiences and perspectives of each participant group. Data were triangulated among the three groups. In addition to interviews, Tallerico conducted participant observation in more than twelve different settings relevant to the study and utilized field notes as supplementary data. Tallerico (2000) found that there are regularities to the superintendent search and selection process, gender biases and other unwritten rules present unique challenges and understanding the stated and unstated norms of selection can lead to successfully accessing the superintendency.

The perspective on preferred experience and career pathway to the superintendent position has been explored by many researchers (Bjork, Keedy & Gurley, 2002; Glass, Bjork & Brunner 2000; Tallerico, 2000). The contextual variables that appear to be important are size (of school, district, or administrative unit) and type of community (rural, suburban, or urban). Superintendents in small districts tend to stay for approximately three years and then move to progressively larger districts. Reasons frequently cited for career moves include prestige, recognition, location, demographics and compensation. This movement upward is often referred to as "moving up" or "moving through" the "chairs" (Black & English, 1996; Carter, Glass & Hord, 1993).

Bjork, Keedy & Gurley (2002) reported on selected findings concerning career patterns from the AASA study conducted by Glass et al. (2000). They reported on superintendents'

career patterns in general and specifically the career patterns of women and people of color in the superintendency. Data from the study suggest the career track for males is commonly via the high school principalship where they acquire skills in managing and leading a large, complex organization and gain experience in working with parents, citizens, and interest groups. Bjork et al. (2002) noted that many regard these tasks as being similar to the work of superintendents. In comparison to the elementary principalship, the high school principalship is viewed as more complex and difficult (Ortiz, 1982). "Secondary schools also tend to attract greater attention than do elementary schools because accountability for academic performance involves several high stakes: graduation or not, acceptance to or rejection by colleges, employment or unemployment after graduation" (Tallerico, 2000, p. 79).

Brunner, Grogan and Prince (2003) reported preliminary findings of their study conducted with the support of AASA, of female superintendents, deputy assistant and associate superintendent in the United States. The survey was based on the AASA survey of superintendents and was modified to address specific questions of choices, career paths and past employment. The survey consisted of 111 multiple-choice questions and eight open-ended questions. The survey was sent to 5,500 female leaders; 2,500 to superintendents and 3,000 to central office administrators with 1,301 surveys returned. In the AASA study conducted by Glass et al. (2000), only 294 responses were from females. The completed surveys represented 723 superintendents and 400 central office administrators. The racial and ethnic group was 92 percent white and 5.2 percent black. The other minority groups were very small, less than 1 percent.

Bjork et al. (2002) reported that the data from the 2000 AASA study indicated that men and women have different career experiences leading to the position of superintendent. Women

more often reported having served as elementary teachers (59.9 percent), district coordinators (55.6 percent), assistant superintendents (50.8 percent), and high school teachers (40 percent), respectively, while men indicated at least one or more years' experience as high school teachers (62.3 percent), junior high and/or middle school teachers (45 percent), assistant superintendents (34.1 percent), and directors or coordinators (28.7 percent), respectively (Glass, et al., 2000, p. 86).

### *Factors Affecting Access to the Superintendency*

Although educators move through their careers through different pathways, many factors affect their movement from one position to another. Gender, educational experiences, district location or size, demographics, leadership styles, supports and barriers influenced the superintendents' career experiences. Shakeshaft (1987) defined internal barriers as barriers that can be overcome by individual change and while external barriers required social and institutional change. Examples of internal barriers were support from family, a variety of work experiences, mentors, formal education and mobility. External barriers may include state requirements for certification, educational requirements, and factors of socialization of gender and ethnicity.

Ortiz (1982) studied 350 school administrators who occupied school positions in California from 1974 – 1976. Ortiz conducted an ethnographic study, which involved collecting data from district documents, 350 interviews with school administrators and observations of school sites, meetings, and other settings in thirty-one school districts. The study focused on the socialization processes as they affected the career patterns of individuals with the primary focus on school administrators. The findings were “that both role and socialization theories lay the burden of successful organization participation upon two critical elements; the individual’s

attributes or capacities and the organization's efforts" (Ortiz, 1982, p. 146). How the school organization perceives the individual's personality and experience influenced the selection of superintendents.

Tallerico (2000) conducted an in-depth case study of superintendent search and selection practices in New York through semi-structured interviews, observations and document analyses of twenty-five school board members, twenty-five search consultants, and twenty-five recent superintendent candidates. Participants noted that during the interview process many intangibles influenced the outcome. These intangibles were often describes as the "chemistry" between the board and the applicant. According to this study's participants, which included search consultants, school board members and applicants, "assessments of 'positive' chemistry and 'good' fit were strongly related to how comfortable board members felt [during interviews] interacting with the candidate in their respective authority roles" (p. 103). One participant in this study reported "personal chemistry" as "It's what we like, what we see, what we hear, how we feel about the person" (p. 103).

Formal educational experiences in the form of college courses and associations with professors were supports that encouraged school administrators as they sought positions with greater responsibilities and made movements up the career ladder. The escalating challenges and responsibilities necessary to lead educational reforms at a district level have caused colleges to restructure educational leadership programs so that school administrators are prepared for the increased demands of these positions (Bjork, Kowalski & Young, 2005).

In the 2000 AASA study by Glass et al. superintendents noted strengths and weaknesses of university-based professional preparation programs. Superintendents in the study stated that strengths included the ability of professors to convey course content (20.2 percent), high-quality

educational administrative course content (19.7 percent) and high-quality professors (18.6 percent). Major weaknesses according to participants included the lack of hands-on application (19.8 percent), inadequate access to technology (18.9 percent) and failure to link content to practice (16.5 percent).

Bjork, Kowalski & Young (2005) noted that several national commissions and task forces looked at the changing role of educational leadership and university-based preparation programs between 1986 and 2003. The demand for reform in education has driven changes in graduate leadership programs. Bjork, et al. (2005) examined the national education reform reports and the implication for professional preparation and development. The National Commission for the Advancement of Educational Leadership Programs (NCAELP) identified seven essential themes for restructuring university-based professional preparation programs. Bjork, et al. (2005) noted "NCAELP recommendations outlined the directions and nature of changes needed to align university-based leadership preparation with the changes taking place in schools" (p. 56).

Researchers have studied mentoring as a support for learning and gaining access to the superintendency. Glass, et al. noted that "The majority of superintendents (59 percent) have been mentored in their careers by a practicing or retired superintendent, regardless of district size, age, race, or gender" (p. 157). Mentoring was reported as a personal and professional learning partnership between a more experienced school leader who acted as guide, role model, coach, teacher, counsel and supporter and a less experienced school leader. Invaluable experience was imparted to those seeking positions of greater responsibility through the mentoring process.

Gilmour and Kinsella (2009) noted that a true mentoring relationship required time and was unique to the individuals involved. The mentor provides the mentee with knowledge, advice, different perspectives and may challenge the mentee to gain a deeper understanding of current issues. Kamler (2006) used qualitative method and utilized observations, questionnaires and interviews to determine the effectiveness of a mentoring network for school leaders located in New York State. The study group was limited to sixty participants and research was conducted over five-years, 2001-2005. Kamler (2006) categorized mentoring functions as psychosocial or career-related. Psychosocial functions included role modeling, acceptance, confirmation, counseling and friendship; career-related functions encompassed sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection and challenging assignments.

Bjork, Kowalski & Browne-Ferrigno (2005) noted "Effective mentors must be available to provide constructive guidance, willing to engage in reflective dialogue, and be able to communicate honestly and openly about their expectations and their actions" (p. 95). Mentors were important in positions such as principals and superintendents as they may be the first to identify leadership potential in individuals. The AASA study (Glass et al., 2000) indicated that 77.9 percent of the superintendents surveyed considered themselves mentors to others who were interested in the position. Levels of support included professional and personal issues that may overwhelm new administrators. Seeking advice from an experienced person in the field enabled new administrators to gain confidence and experience.

Career barriers were categorized as either internal factors, those associated with the individual, or external factors, those involving society or institutions (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993; Kowalski, Stouder, & Judy, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1987). Internal factors included low aspirations, personal beliefs and attitudes, motivation, and self-image. External factors included gender

discrimination, family responsibilities, lack of mobility, and lack of sponsorship or effective mentors (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993).

Gender is a factor that researchers have studied extensively during the last ten years. The AASA study (Glass, et al., 2000) indicated that women make up thirteen percent (13.0%) of superintendents, double the proportion of women superintendents in the 1992 survey. The 2000 sample was the largest of any of the studies, containing 2,261 responses from superintendents across the nation. Of those reporting their gender, 1,953 were male and 297 were female.

According to the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), *Snapshot 2006: The 6th Triennial Study of the Superintendency in New York (2006)*, women historically represented fewer than ten percent of the superintendents in the state; however women comprised thirty percent of superintendents hired between 2000 and 2003 and thirty-five percent of those hired between 2003 and 2006. Nearly fifty percent of new hires of superintendents in 2006 were women. The NYSCOSS study (2006) indicated that a large number of retirements have been male and there were more women with administrative credentials (60 percent), which may be factors for the increases in female superintendents. The study did note:

Although the dramatic turnover has resulted in steep increases in the number of women in the superintendency, it has not resulted in a similar increase in racial or ethnic diversity. This is particularly ironic since person of color were more than twice as likely as women to report that their gender/ethnicity had been an asset in their career (48 percent vs. 19 percent) (*Snapshot 2006*, p. 8).

Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich (2000), Chase (1995) and Bell (1995) conducted research to study the social constructions of gender and the public school superintendency from the perspective of women superintendents. Skrla et al. (2000) conducted a study in which participants were selected as excellent or rich examples of the phenomenon of interest. Former superintendents were chosen because the researchers felt that they would be able to talk more freely about their experiences. They used the interactive-relational approach to interviewing to balance the professional responsibility of the researcher with the goal of understanding the interviewee. The researchers discussed the three interrelated parts of the study results - "the sexism that is part of the culture of the superintendency, the silence of the educational administration profession about women superintendents' discriminatory experiences, and the study participants' proposed solutions for the problems of sexism and silence" (p. 44). These researchers used terms such as isolation, silence and cultural pressure to "de-feminize" when describing the experiences of participants. Skrla et al. (2000) stated that the participants "experienced sexism when they were stereotyped, persecuted, or discriminated against based on their gender" (p. 56). The results indicated woman superintendents in this study dealt with the institutional sexism and discriminatory treatment by themselves and in silence.

Glass et al. (2000) found that the career paths of women differed from men in that they were more inclined to move from teacher to a central office position that emphasized curriculum and instruction, which hindered gaining experience in finance, administration, and community relations. The 2000 AASA study (Glass et al., 2000) reported that 78 percent of males began their administrative careers as assistant principals (35.8 percent), or principals (42.2 percent) as compared to 57 percent of women who began their careers as assistant principals (26.9 percent),



principals (30.3 percent), with an additional 30.6 percent of females who had begun as director or coordinator as compared to males (11.2 percent).

Ethnic minority superintendents are severely underrepresented in the superintendency. The 2000 AASA study conducted by Glass, et al. indicated that of the 2,262 superintendents who responded, only 117 were minorities. African Americans account for 5.3 percent of the sample (2.0 percent male, 5.1 percent female), followed by 2.7 percent Hispanic superintendents (1.4 male, 1.3 percent female). Participation of minorities in this study was an increase of 2 percent from the 1992 study. Approximately 75 percent of minority superintendents had been in the position nine or fewer years as compared to 84 percent of females and 57 percent of white males. The remaining 43 percent of white males had been in the position for more than nine years.

According to Dunlop (1997), the traditional staffing structure of public school administration consisted of white males occupying line positions, women occupying staff positions, and minorities occupying special project positions. Alston (2005) in a historical analysis of women's roles in educational leadership reports that blacks and Hispanics represent 15.9% of the nation's population and 28% of the nation's schoolchildren. "In the United States, persons of color represent 10.9 % of the nation's teachers, 12.3% of the nation's principals, but only 2.2% of the nation's superintendents" (Alston, 2005, p.675). In New York State there have been limited increases in the level of diversity of school superintendents. In the current survey (NYSCOSS, *Snapshot* 2006), 94.2 reported themselves as Caucasian, 2.1 percent African Americans and 1.1 percent as Hispanics. It was reported, "Although the sample size is small, there was slightly greater racial or ethnic diversity in the superintendency in New York, as compared to 2003" (p. 20).

Superintendents' career pathways can be classified by their "boundedness". Carlson (1962) used terminology of "career-bound" and "place-bound" to categorize the "boundedness" of a superintendent's career. Carlson defined career-bound as a superintendent who chose to "pursue the superintendency in more than one district, making a career as superintendent rather than as a public school employee" (p. 8). Place-bound superintendents "waited for the superintendency instead of pursuing it in another district or assumed the superintendency without having planned to do so" (Carlson, 1962, p. 8). For these individuals, residing in a specific location or working within a particular geographic area or district is more important than ascending rapidly to the position of superintendent. Family considerations and ties to the local community may affect their decision to stay in one geographic location.

#### *Summary*

There continues to be increasing interest in the role and responsibilities of the chief school officer. The projected need for educators to step into the arena of the superintendency due to the anticipated retirements of incumbent superintendents accentuates the need for a deeper understanding of the career pathways to the superintendency. Aspiring superintendents need a sophisticated comprehension of the various factors that can accelerate or impede their career pathway.

Glass, et al., (2000), Bjork, et al., (2005) and Ortiz, (1982) identified the career pathway of the superintendent as teacher, building level administrator, and central office administrator. Males most often were high school principals and females were elementary principals. Most females were teachers for more than ten years and males taught for an average of five years.

Various factors influenced the career pathway including educational experiences, gender, ethnicity, type of district and geographic location (Glass, et al., 2000; Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft,

1987; Tallerico, 2000). Cooper, et al. (2000) identified the skill set which supported success in the superintendency. This included interpersonal communication and human relation skills, community relations, management of finance and budget, facilities planning, personnel, labor issues, race relations, curriculum design, instruction, professional development, and technology.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study explored career pathways of public school superintendents from the Greater Capital Region of New York State and their perceptions of their career pathway and experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency. This was a qualitative study focused on the phenomena of career pathways to the superintendency. The following research questions guided the exploration:

1. What were the career pathways of the superintendents?
2. What were the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency?

#### *Design*

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach. Multiple perspectives were considered including the factors involved and documenting the emerging picture (Creswell, 2009). Participants shared their experiences in focus group interviews and submitted information through research instruments. The intent of the focus group was to allow participants to interact with other participants in an environment in which disclosures were encouraged. The focus group represented a natural environment for interaction because participants were influencing and are influenced by others just as they are in life (Krueger 1994).

The study explored the career pathways of select New York State superintendents from the Greater Capital Region. Focus groups provided insights about attitudes and perceptions of the participants (Krueger, 1994). Superintendents' perceptions of their career pathway and the experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency were also investigated. The design of the study was based on the qualitative research method where the researcher identifies

the essence of experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell, 2009) through focus groups (Krueger, 1994).

This qualitative study utilized public information from the New York State Education Department, Basic Educational Data System (BEDS), and identified a purposive sample of superintendents using years of experience and gender as identifying criteria. Participants completed a questionnaire, participated in one focus group interview and completed a reflection questionnaire.

#### *Definitions*

The researcher organized the focus groups by utilizing years of service and gender as criteria for the establishment of focus group interviews. The term “new” identified the participant as in their first superintendency with two years or less experience in the position. The term “veteran” identified the participant as a superintendent with eight or more years in the position. Gender and time of service were factors that the researcher utilized in the study to describe career pathways. Four focus group categories were established, new male (NM), new female (NF), veteran male (VM), and veteran female (VF).

#### *Participants*

All participants were public school superintendents at the time they participated in the study or had served as a superintendent within the prior twelve years. The researcher included retired superintendents (three females, one male) and those who had retired and were currently in interim superintendent positions (two males). The researcher used a purposive sampling method utilizing public information from the New York State Education Department, Basic Educational Data System (BEDS), which was requested in October 2008, to identify an extreme case sampling of superintendents using years of experience as an identifying criterion. BEDS data

was compiled from 2007 data collection which the researcher incorporated into the selection process of participants. The list was rank ordered using the years of service field, listing from the most to least years of service. All participants held superintendent positions in the Greater Capital Region during their career.

Eighteen participants accepted an invitation to participate in the study; sixteen participated by completing the research instruments (questionnaire and reflections) and attending one focus group interview. Two participants were unable to attend the scheduled focus group interviews due to emergency district level obligations and therefore the information collected from those participants was not utilized in this study.

Extreme case sampling was used for years of service. The sampling procedures did not yield equal size groups in the same proportions as in the entire population. The sample was sixteen (16) participants divided into four focus groups; veteran/male, veteran/female, new/male, new/female.

Information from the BEDS data was verified by contacting potential participants to verify contact information and information concerning factors of gender and years of service. Potential participants were contacted by letter, telephone or e-mail for voluntary participation in this study during February through May of 2009. All participants were sent a letter of invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A). All participants signed an informed consent (Appendix B) when they attended the focus group interview.

Focus group interviews were scheduled from March through May 2009. The first focus group interview was scheduled in March with four new male (NM) superintendents. One participant called and could not attend due to a district emergency. The second focus group was scheduled in March with six new female (NF) superintendents. Three of the six participants

could not attend due to district emergencies that occurred on the scheduled day but wanted to participate therefore an additional focus group interview was scheduled in April 2009. Two of the three new female superintendents participated in that scheduled (fourth) focus group. The third focus group interview was scheduled at the end of March for veteran male (VM) superintendents. All four participants attended the scheduled focus group. The fifth focus group was scheduled in May and four veteran female (VF) superintendents participated. All focus group interviews were audio and video-taped to ensure accuracy of data collected.

#### *Instrumentation*

In each of the five focus groups, each participant was requested to complete a Focus Group Questionnaire (Appendix C), participated in a focus group interview and complete a Focus Group Reflections questionnaire (Appendix D). The researcher prepared all research instruments. The Focus Group Questionnaire was designed to collect information pertaining to demographics and career pathways. This information was requested through ten semi-structured questions and three open-ended questions. The research instrument included name, gender, marital status, education and documentation of the career pathway experience of each participant. Each participant was pre-assigned to a scheduled focus group interview. An interview protocol (Appendix E) was established to ensure that each focus group interview was conducted in the same way. The researcher was the facilitator of the discussion and did not impart any bias, opinions or share in the discussion. Each group was asked the same questions (Appendix B). The questions were designed to explore the career pathways and superintendents' perceptions of experiences that may affect access to the position and differences in career pathways based on gender. The focus group discussions were conducted using sixteen semi-

structured, open-ended questions and were face-to-face interviews. All focus group interviews were audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy.

At the conclusion of the focus group interview, each participant was invited to complete a Focus Group Reflection questionnaire (Appendix C) and send to the researcher. This instrument was designed to create an opportunity for participants to record any additional thoughts, comments, concerns or questions they might have wanted to express individually after the focus group discussion.

Reliability and validity of the research instruments was established by pilot testing the documents. Each research instrument was pilot tested using two Capital Region superintendents (1 NF, 1VM) who were known to the researcher and are representative of the sample. The superintendents reviewed each research instrument with the researcher to understand the purpose of the study, type of participant and to review the questioning route (Krueger, 1994). The superintendents involved in pilot testing completed the Focus Group questionnaire and returned to the researcher with feedback on the research instruments. The researcher charted the responses to ensure that the information would answer the research questions of the study. The researcher reviewed the Focus Group Interview questions and Reflections research instrument with the two superintendents. The suggestions and feedback were incorporated when making changes to the research instruments. Attention was placed on the logical flow of questions and the ability of questions to elicit the information desired (Krueger, 1994). The information was reviewed by the researcher and the superintendents to confirm clarity of the research instrument items and the information collected supported the research questions. Feedback on length and format clarity supported changes in the forms. The information collected was not included in the reporting of the findings.



The researcher utilized the first focus group interview as a pilot test and the data obtained was compared after the procedure was changed to ensure that the research instruments, interview protocol and composition of the participants provided data that supported the study. The researcher reflected on the wording and sequencing of the questions, setting and participants. Minor changes were made such as limited the number of questions.

#### *Data Collection*

The researcher collected data from the research instruments (focus group questionnaire and reflections), audio and videotapes of five focus group interviews and observations through the facilitation of the focus group interviews. This approach is based on Creswell (2009) "Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, and documents, rather than rely on a single data source. The researcher reviewed all of the data, made sense of it, and organized it into categories or themes that cut across all of the data sources" (p. 175).

The eighteen participants completed the Focus Group Questionnaire which provided critical demographic information and the career pathway. Participants were able to document their experiences through three open-ended questions. Ten participants completed and returned the reflections.

#### *Data Analysis*

Data from the research instruments and transcripts from focus group interviews were analyzed through a process of coding, grouping and sorting, and data reduction (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Emergent themes and concepts were identified, interpreted and aligned with the research questions (Creswell, 2009). The researcher used NVivo8 software to facilitate the coding, sorting and organization of the data.

Qualitative data were collected through research instruments and focus group interviews. Focus groups allowed the researcher to direct the conversation toward the research topics that were investigated and to follow new ideas as they arise (Krueger & Morgan, 1998). Demographic information was summarized and presented in an Excel spreadsheet. All participants were assigned a number and information was presented in tables.

Transcriptions were read multiple times by the researcher and coding was utilized to categorize emerging themes. Bogdan and Biklin (1998) and Creswell (2009) utilized a systematic approach for coding with the researcher identifying an idea or phenomenon and attaching a code. This approach included multiply readings of the data and establishing a preliminary list of possible codes utilizing "units of data" (Bogdan & Biklin, p.182). The coding categories were modified, new categories developed and old ones discarded during this process.

The first transcript was hand coded by the researcher multiple times to ensure all themes and ideas emerged were identified. Re-reading and attaching codes provided the researcher the ability to establish a codebook. Each code was defined and data were compared to the code to ensure accuracy. NVivo8 qualitative analysis software was used to classify, categorize and organize all data collected through the focus group interviews. The researcher entered the codes in parent nodes and child nodes using NVivo8. All transcripts were imported into NVivo8 and the researcher coded all transcripts utilizing the codes. Themes were analyzed for each participant and shaped into general descriptions utilizing rich, descriptive language to explain participants' perceptions and experiences. An external expert was used to confirm coding.

#### *Reliability and Validity*

Qualitative procedures such as focus groups enable the researcher to understand the participants' perspectives on select topics. The moderator can challenge and probe for the most

truthful responses, which supports validity (Krueger, 1994). In this study, the researcher protected validity by verifying all information collected from the research instruments, and verified all audio recording with video recording and with the transcriptions of the focus group interviews. In addition, the three research instruments were piloted with superintendents who were not participants in the study. Data were triangulated by comparing the demographic survey results with the focus group transcriptions and the results of the reflection responses for common responses to establish reliability. The same interview protocol was followed for all focus group interviews. The coding system was developed following Krueger's (1994) recommendations and the coding strategy was confirmed by an external, independent researcher with experience in qualitative research utilizing focus group methodology. A transcription with no identifying factors was sent to an external independent expert for coding with an established codebook. Codes matched with 95 percent accuracy and this confirmed coding by the researcher.

#### *Confidentiality*

All responses and contributions to the questionnaires, focus group and reflection questions were confidential. Participants were addressed by first names to maintain confidentiality during the audio and video-recorded focus group sessions.

An identifying number such as NF1 ("New" female 1) was assigned to individual participants or groups mentioned or discussed in published reports or presentations. Any records or documentations with identifying information about individual participants, including digital recordings, transcripts, taped interviews and computer files were destroyed upon completion of the project.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This phenomenological study explored career pathways of public school superintendents from the Greater Capital Region of New York State and their perceptions of career pathways and experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency. The primary data source was focus group interviews. The following research questions guided the exploration:

1. What were the career pathways of the superintendents?
2. What were the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced attainment of the superintendency?

The following questions guided the study:

1. What were the career pathways of new and veteran superintendents?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of new and veteran superintendents?
3. What were the perceptions and experiences of male and female superintendents?

Analysis involved review of the Focus Group Questionnaire, analysis of video, audio and transcribed records of five sessions of focus group interviews (60-120 minutes) and review of the Focus Group Reflections. Transcriptions of the focus group interviews were analyzed and coded to understand the participants' perceptions of their career pathway and experiences that influenced the career pathway to the superintendency.

To answer the first research question -What are the career pathways of the superintendents? the researcher analyzed the responses to the Focus Group Questionnaire. Participants responded to ten semi-structured questions concerning demographic information and their experiences during their career pathway to the position of superintendent. Information

collected from the questionnaire included but was not limited to name, gender, ethnicity, age, marital status, educational experiences, and career pathway to the superintendency.

To answer the second research question, What are the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency?, the researcher analyzed responses from the Focus Group Interviews and additional findings pertaining to the following subtopics from the open-ended questions from the Focus Group Questionnaire.

1. What position most prepared you for the superintendency?
2. Please describe any special circumstances you have encountered during your career pathway.
3. Would you choose the same career pathway to superintendent? Why or why not?

All participants were invited to return a Focus Group Reflections questionnaire to record any additional thoughts, comments, issues and questions that the participant would like to share. Responses from this research instrument were incorporated into the data analysis.

### *Career Pathways*

#### *Research Question 1: What were the career pathways of the superintendents?*

The sixteen participants included eight females and eight males. All participants were Caucasian. Eight "new" superintendents were in their first position as superintendent with two or less years of experience. The eight "veteran" superintendents had eight or more years of experience in the position. The career pathways of the sixteen superintendents were similar in that fourteen of sixteen of the participants began as teachers (7 men, 7 females). Two of the participants; one female began in guidance and one male began in a business position in a district central office. The superintendents who held positions in smaller districts (5) were able to move

from a principal position to a superintendent position. Ten superintendents held an Assistant Superintendent position prior to obtaining the superintendency. The superintendents were between the ages of thirty-six to fifty eight when they obtained their first superintendency.

The participant code N was assigned to indicate “new”, defined as individuals in their first superintendency with two or less years of experience. V indicates “veteran”, defined as a superintendent with eight or more years of experience. M indicates male and F indicates female. Numbers were assigned for convenience to the researcher.

All participants held Masters Degrees, six had Certificates of Advanced Study (CAS), and eight participants had doctoral degrees. Four of the participants were career-bound (one NM, one NF and two VF). Carlson (1962) described the career-bound person as one who pursues the superintendency in more than one district and makes career decisions purposefully to obtain the position. Nine never aspired to the position of superintendent and three stated during focus group discussions that as they progressed through their career pathway that perhaps they would eventually become systems leaders.

Table 1.  
*Career Pathways of Participants* (N<math>\leq</math>2 yrs experience, V>math>\geq</math>8yrs experience, M=Male, F=Female)

Participants	Career Pathway				Yrs
NM1	Teacher	Director of	Assistant	Assistant	27
	Spanish	Athletics	Principal	Superintendent	
NM2	Teacher	Associate	Principal	Assistant	15
		Principal	Middle School	Superintendent	
NM3	Administrative	Assistant	Assistant		25

	Assistant to Superintendent	Superintendent of Business	Superintendent of Business			
NF1	Teacher Elementary	Assistant Principal Elementary	Principal Elementary	Director of Elementary Education	Deputy Superintendent	34
NF2	Teacher Kindergarten	Human Resources Coordinator	Director of Personnel	Assistant Superintendent for Instruction		26
NF3	Teacher	Department Supervisor	Assistant Principal	Principal Elementary		29
NF4	Teacher	Director of Pupil Personnel Services	Assistant Director Pupil Personnel Services	Director Pupil Personnel Services	Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction	17
NF5	Guidance Counselor	Supervisor- Student & Comm.	Assistant Principal - Elementary	Principal Elementary	Assistant Superintendent	24
VM1	Teacher	Assistant Principal	Assistant Professor	Assistant Superintendent		36
VM2	Teacher	Dean of Students	Assistant Principal	Principal	Assistant Superintendent	31
VM3	Teacher	Assistant Principal	Principal K-12			36

		Middle School				
VM4	Teacher	Assistant	Principal	Director of	Principal	49
		Principal	Middle School	Curriculum	High School	
VF1	Teacher	Coordinator of	Principal			32
		Special Needs	Elementary			
		Students				
VF2	Teacher	Principal	Director of	Assistant		33
		Elementary	Elementary	Superintendent		
			Education			
VF3	Teacher	Principal				37
VF4	Teacher	Assistant				33
		Principal				
		High School				

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\*Years of Service = Total years in education

*Subtopic: What were the career pathways of new and veteran superintendents?*

*“New” Superintendents*

There were eight participants in the category of “new” superintendents ranging in age from thirty-nine to fifty-eight years old. There were three males and five females; all indicated their ethnicity as white or Caucasian. Four participants were married (2 males, 2 females), one separated (1 male), one single (1 female) and one divorced (1 female). None of the participants had school-aged children at the time data were collected. All eight “new” participants had



obtained Masters Degrees; an additional four had obtained Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS), two participants held doctorates and three were enrolled in a doctoral program.

All "new" participants were in their first superintendency. Five participants became superintendents in a district other than one in which they had previous experience. Three participants became superintendents in their own district. Five participants relocated to accept positions as superintendents with two districts requiring the superintendent to live in the district in which they were employed. Five districts used the Regional BOCES as search consultants during the superintendent search process and three districts did not use search consultants.

Table 2.

*District Demographic Information of "New" Superintendents*

Participant	Type of District	Enrollment	Residency
NM1	Suburban	850	No
NM2	Suburban	4400	No
NM3	Urban	2045	No
NF1	Suburban	6800	Yes
NF2	Rural	1050	Yes
NF3	Urban	350	No
NF4	Suburban	4300	No
NF5	Rural	2150	No

The career pathways of "new" participants were unique to each individual. Six of the eight participants began their career as a teacher with a combined total of seventy-four years of teaching experience. Males averaged seven years and females averaged thirteen years in the

classroom. Two participants, one male and one female, did not begin as teachers. The male began as an administrative assistant to a superintendent and the female was a guidance counselor and five participants were building level administrators. Seven of the participants had experience as assistant superintendents; only one participant moved from a building principal to a superintendent.

#### “Veteran” Superintendents

Eight participants were “veteran” superintendents with eight or more years of experience in the position. There were four males and four females, all indicating their ethnicity as Caucasian. Six superintendents were married (4 males, 2 females), one female was divorced and one was single. One indicated having school aged children during the time she was a superintendent. All eight “veteran” superintendents held Masters Degrees; one male and one female obtained a Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS) and six (3 male, 3 females) held doctorates.

All “veteran” superintendents ranged in years of service in the position from eight to twenty years serving one to four districts. Three participants served all types of districts (rural, suburban and urban), with the remaining five serving two rural and three suburban districts. Two participants were BOCES superintendents when they retired. Seven superintendents were retired and one planned to retire by December 2009. Two retired superintendents held interim positions in local districts. Six participants were hired by districts who utilized search consultants. Seven participants relocated for the position. Six participants did not work for districts that required them to live in the district with two that did require residency.

*Perceptions of Career Pathways and Experiences that Influenced Attainment of the  
Superintendency*

*Research Question 2: What were the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced the attainment of the superintendency?*

The following responses were from the open-ended questions on the Focus Group Questionnaire, which was completed by each participant.

*Subtopic: What were the perceptions and experiences of new and veteran superintendents?*

**Question:** What position most prepared you for the superintendency?

Eleven participants (NM – 3, NF – 4, VM – 3, VF – 1) noted that the position that most prepared them for the superintendency was the experienced obtained as an assistant superintendent. Three participants noted the principalship (VF – 2, VM – 1) and two indicated that the diverse experience (NF – 1, VF – 1) during their career supported their preparation for the superintendency.

**Question:** Please describe any special circumstances you have encountered during your career pathway?

One “new” superintendent indicated that moving from out of state was challenging due to the differences in state aid to education and the need to understand it. Another “new” superintendent indicated that moving from a building assistant principal to a central office position required a lot of support from the superintendent and the Board of Education. One “new” female superintendent wrote about the encouragement she received to apply was a special circumstance:

I was a finalist for an elementary principal position after having served as the assistant principal in the building. The superintendent was in his first months of his position after

following a female superintendent who was forced to resign after two years. He was reluctant to hire a female principal as his first act so he picked the high school assistant principal (male) for the position. I remained as assistant principal for five years in this building. (NF1)

Four participants did not answer this question.

Written comments from “veteran” superintendents included support of family, learning from experiences along the pathway, and empowering people who want schools to be successful for children. Two of the participants wrote about the importance of the role of mentor along their pathway. A veteran male wrote “Good fortune – a superintendent who took a chance to hire me and gave me a good leadership model and encouraged growth.” (VM1)

**Question:** Would you choose the same career pathway to Superintendent and why?

Four “new” superintendents would choose the same career pathway and four would not. One participant indicated a need for more experience in school business, personnel and dealing with the Board of Education. Three participants indicated that time as a building principal would have been beneficial for an increased knowledge base. One “new” female superintendent wrote:

I went into administration to hopefully become a principal in the elementary school where I was teaching. The principal at the time was thinking about retiring and I was hoping to replace him. I never got a chance to be a principal and that principal never retired and it is almost 10 years later. (NF2)

All eight “veteran” superintendents would choose the same career pathway. Comments included: “challenging”, “always wanted to make a difference”, “enjoyed all the experiences”, and “learning and growth experience”. One “veteran” commented that “starting as a superintendent at an earlier age” would be one change.

The following responses are from the questions asked during each of the focus group interviews.

**Question:** What was the process that you went through leading up to the decision to apply for the position of Superintendent?

Nine participants (3 New, 6 Veteran) had never aspired to the position of the superintendent. Three "New" superintendents had begun to aspire to the position during their career. Three of the "New" (1 M, 2 F) superintendents never planned for the superintendency as the goal of their career. Comments included:

And two years ago if you had asked me did I aspire to a superintendent position, I absolutely would have said no. But a combination of things that were happening around me professionally caused me to see...to reflect on my abilities. And I started to grasp the idea that I could do the work. I started to let go of hesitancy and doubt. And I don't know, I guess I kind of grew some strength. (NM1)

I never aspired to be a superintendent, even though people would have these conversations with me about this, that and the other thing. I never aspired that, and I think gender has a lot to do with that. But I did aspire to being very committed to having the highest educational opportunities possible and having someplace where you could maybe make it work. (NF3)

Four of the participants (1 NM, 1NF, 2VF) were career-bound. Two "new" superintendents (1 male/1 female) had always aspired to the position and aligned their career path to accomplish this goal. They were the youngest members of the group of "new" superintendents. One of the two veteran females who were career-bound made this comment:

I thought about it seriously in my first school district, when I was an elementary teacher and then principal. The superintendent said to me, 'you really should get your doctorate; you have all the skills to be a superintendent.' That stimulus really put me out on the journey, although I did not do it right away. I never forgot that, 'you are ready to do this, do it'. (VF2)

**Question:** What kinds of opportunities and benefits do you recall during your career that helped your career pathway?

When the superintendents were asked about what kinds of opportunities and benefits they recalled that supported their career pathway, all of the superintendents noted that it was the collected array of experiences that supported the successful attainment of their first superintendent position. The superintendents who began as teachers stated that they still rely on those experiences as they lead their districts. The following comment reflected this common theme:

I think it was the accumulated breath of experience as well as depth, because in any teaching position I had, in any administrative position, I tried to gain as much as I could as deeply as I could. So it is that, but I think also, for me, it is probably the amount of time I spent as a teacher, because it always comes back to teaching. (NF3)

Experiences were vast and varied in responsibilities and position in many different positions and responsibilities but all stated that learning new aspects of the district was why they sought out positions and opportunities. All the participants talked about the high level of "self-imposed" professionalism, work ethic and eagerness to learn. One "new" female talked about being "driven" and "for Halloween she dressed up as a school superintendent as a kid," because becoming a superintendent was her dream job." The "veteran" males and females talked about

“cheerleaders”, “being focused”, “how you built your skills and even your reputation” as they discussed their experiences. The “veteran” females discussed seeking out opportunities to learn what they did not know to ensure that they would not be “tripped up” during an interview. Some of the superintendents moved from district to district to gain new positions and experiences. One “new” female spoke of bravery:

It is a very brave thing to do, to continually from early on, seek out other opportunities to switch districts, so you are constantly in a new position. You have to establish yourself, get an understanding of the political environment, an understanding of whom everyone is. That is one of the bravest thing I think that you can do and some people are very afraid to move around for that reason. (NF4)

Some participants stayed within their district and became more involved, willing to take on projects and responsibilities beyond the scope of their positions.

All the superintendents spoke of learning from their system leader; they had learned “lessons” from each of them whether it was things to do or not to do, how to behave or not behave. “New” and “veteran” males spoke of support and opportunities to lead, being “molded”, “groomed” and “a certain kind of fortuitous events that happened sometimes.”

I would not have had that opportunity if I did not take the chance to ‘get in the game’ and learn about how to ‘be in the game’. And I always had those experiences and because they were so rich, my game grew exponentially pretty quickly. (NM2)

**Question:** What kinds of obstacles and barriers do you recall during your career that hindered your career pathway?

The “new” male superintendents did not recall any obstacles or barriers. One “new” male stated that he did not intend to become a superintendent and therefore had no obstacles and

his attainment of his first position was very smooth and quick. "New" females discussed the issue of gender and the awareness of "attitudes out there". One "new" female spoke of a situation that occurred many years ago.

It was life changing for me in terms of awareness of how deep some of this went. That there was this real fear, that his first act as male superintendent following two females, who in somebody's eyes were not successful, that they were not going to bring the internal female up a notch. I think, just as an example of the impact of and the pressure put on to be successful, because you are representing your gender. That was back in the 80's and that wasn't that recently, but there weren't as many female superintendents for sure and a female superintendent got there and was not successful in somebody's eyes, it was like 'they can't do it'. It was something that has remained with me for a long time, about sometimes how unfair the process can be. (NF1)

Another "new" female discussed the awareness of "being a female could be a problem". She recounted an interview for a middle school position for which she felt highly qualified. She interviewed with a "bully" male principal and an "old-school" assistant superintendent. She stated that when it came down to it, the mentality of the district was that they wanted "a big guy, he'll be stronger and they wanted the bouncer" (NF2). The "shock of it" for her was that the district could not see the "difference". She stated that that was when she learned about the "fit" for the district.

Six of the eight "veteran" superintendents discussed the burden of the job on their families and not wanting to move for a superintendent position. Three of the "veteran" males discussed the perceptions of districts concerning their associations with former superintendents or not having the perceived experience (high school) or abilities to be successful as a



superintendent. One "veteran" female discussed the impact of divorce, raising her children and the financial burden of coursework. One "veteran" female discussed her first superintendency and becoming immediately involved in a political/legal "crisis" that could have been a "career buster". All of the "veteran" females discussed how "being female in the early days was a barrier of sorts".

The second superintendency that I interviewed for, I did make the commitment that if I was invited to be interviewed, I would go even though it seemed clear that they were looking for a male superintendent because that was what everyone was looking for pretty much. I would be the token female. (VF3)

The "veteran" female was hired as the superintendent and remained in the position for ten years. She can still recall a Board member saying to her, "we certainly didn't intend to hire a female, but here you are". The discussion focused on the "mindsets" of districts. "Men can do this job and women, maybe, can't -- make the hard decisions, do discipline, or do the budget".

**Question:** Was there one person or factor that influenced your access to the superintendency?

Each of the superintendents spoke about the importance of mentors along their career pathway. The "new" superintendents discussed seeking out opportunities and watching strong leaders to gain skills, understandings of approaches to problems and solutions to issues. One "new" female superintendent specifically discussed a family member who had been a superintendent. She commented:

I watched it from the dinner table, all the way up in terms of what the profession is all about. I mean this deep love of and respect for the profession and what it meant and that it was really not a job and you shouldn't be looking at it as a job. (NF1)

The four “veteran” males commented on working for superintendents who gave them the opportunities to participate in all district level functions. All four of the “veteran” females discussed at length the importance of male and female mentors early in their careers. Comments included “it was because someone ‘touched’ you” and “someone believed in you”. Encouragement from their superintendents, members of the Board, and support from family enabled them to pursue the experiences necessary to become a superintendent.

**Question:** Did your college experience or a particular program influence your access to the superintendency?

Six of the eight “new” superintendents discuss the benefits of their experiences during college that support their career pathway. They felt that the knowledge gained through course work, purposefully selected programs and interactions with practitioners from the field all supported their pathway. Overall, eight superintendents (3VM, 3VF, 1NM, 1NF) have doctoral degrees and three (NF) are in the process of obtaining doctorates. One noted:

The rigor of that Ph. D program did nothing but refine my skills especially with organizational management, building organizational capacity and an understanding of those perspectives about how to develop institutions. (NM2)

Two of the “veteran” females discussed their reasons for obtaining a doctoral degree. One stated that the reason was pragmatic – so people could not tell her that she was not qualified to be interviewed for the position of superintendent and the other wanted to be completely prepared for the position because the applicant pool was as large as one hundred twenty applicants.

Two of the “veteran” males noted that their pursuit of an educational administration degree was circumstantial. Each had been invited to join another group of people who wanted to become administrators, so they signed up and traveled with them to attend classes.

**Question:** What factors supported your successful attainment of your first superintendency?

There are common factors that supported the successful attainment of the first superintendency across all participants; diverse experiences, strong backgrounds in education, confidence, and high levels of encouragement from superintendents, colleagues and family.

Many of the superintendents discuss the “fit” between the candidate and the district.

I definitely think it was the “fit” piece of it, that I had the pieces that the board was looking for at the time. If finance was their issue at the time I would not have been their person, business is not my background. I think they are looking at the big picture, ‘what is necessary to move this district forward. She has curriculum experience, she has the personnel experience and she is seeing things from a different place. (NF2)

“New” superintendents spoke about interviewing the district to ensure that they wanted to work in the culture that was established. Three of them were very specific in their need to work in districts that were in not in conflict, smaller districts and the ability to have contact with students.

And when I saw this, it was 1000 students, two schools; your office is in the high school...so I could actually be that change agent, somebody that could make things happen and be close to the kids and the teachers, that was really appealing. When I got there, I fell in love with it. So I knew it was the right thing, I knew it was the right fit. But I was looking for the fit more than anything else. (NF2)

Two of the “new” females were selected from within their own districts to be the systems leader. They discussed how the high level of past performance was a key factor during the selection process.

**Question:** Is your current/last position of superintendent what you anticipated and would you become a superintendent if you had to do it over again?

The superintendents described the position of superintendent as “everything that was anticipated and more” during the focus group interviews. All agreed that it was a 24/7 job, a way of life more than a position. Each group discussed the perceptions of the public. One “new” female commented, “You are a public figure without being elected. You are the superintendent, wherever you go, whatever you do, you are the superintendent”. One “veteran” superintendent remembers when he first became a superintendent and his wife asked him, “What do you do?”, and his answer was “I don’t know but it takes me all day to do it”.

“New” and “Veteran” male superintendents noted the benefits of relationships with other superintendents as high quality interactions that were supportive and they consider their input as a resource for learning. Taking “care” of the Board of Education was a central discussion in “new” superintendent focus groups. Comments centered on the role of the superintendent and the responsibility for the “board’s well-being as a group and as individuals”. One superintendent commented on the “internal executive leadership piece” and the lack of flexibility to bring an established leadership team to support the efforts of the systems leader.

I think it’s everything that was expected. The disadvantage in coming in, unlike any other CEO position, you don’t come in and bring a team or hire a team. You come in and you are stuck with a team. (NM2)

All of the superintendents initially stated with great enthusiasm that they would definitely be a superintendent if they had to do it over again. One comment was “I love being king, because King is the place to be. I would do it again in a heartbeat”. Two “new” superintendents stated that they would enter the position much earlier in their career and one “veteran” stated that

waiting to enter the position would have been better. Two “new” superintendents took a few minutes to think about the position and the possibilities of careers. One asked to have the question repeated, “Would you become a superintendent all over again?” Both stated that they would have explored other career options such as “being in a band”, “coaching college ball” and “radio and TV broadcasting”. It is not that being a superintendent had not been a great experience but “Now there are other avenues of educational entrepreneurship out there, where as now our assets go greatly underappreciated”. (NM 2)

**Question:** What do you think is the most direct career pathway? Could you have taken a more direct pathway and has the pathway changed over time?

Many of the superintendents agreed that the pathway to the superintendency was so diverse that it would be difficult to decide if the pathways could be more direct. Three of the “new” superintendents stated that their pathway was the most direct for them. Each participant felt that their journey was what caused their successful attainment of the position. “Veteran” superintendents discussed the importance of experience as a building level administrator and the assistant superintendent position. There was limited discussion concerning whether the pathway had changed over time due to limited knowledge about career pathways other than their own.

#### *Reflection Questionnaire*

Each participant was requested to complete a Focus Group Reflections questionnaire. Six of the eight “new” superintendents returned their reflections. Most commented on the theme of career pathways and the opportunity to discuss the pathways and experiences of systems leaders new in the position. Both males and females commented on the discussion involving gender. It caused them further personal reflection. Many commented on a level of personal enjoyment from being involved in the study.

Four of the eight “veteran” superintendents returned their reflections. They commented on the level of enjoyment of the position, characteristics for success and the discussion on gender. Both males and females commented on the opportunity to discuss the career pathway and their experiences.

*Subtopic: What were the perceptions and experiences of male and female superintendents?*

**Question:** Do you believe that the career pathway is different for men and women?

The superintendents had many different perspectives on the similarities and differences of gender as a factor for the career pathway and the experiences that influence attainment of the superintendency. This question was declared a “hot topic” and discussions were animated and the volume increased in each group.

Ten superintendents (5 NF, 4VF, 1VM) stated that they believed the career pathway is different for women than for men. Four (3NM, 1VM) thought that the career pathway was the same, one “veteran” male thought it was changing and one “veteran” male did not comment on the question. “Veteran” females had the shortest discussion, which focused on their experiences along their pathway such as most high school principals were men, coaching experience was prevalent in superintendents and women felt more responsible for family obligations.

“Veteran” males discussed that the pathway would need to be similar based on the skills, experience and knowledge necessary for success in the position. One superintendent stated, “There is no monopoly on making mistakes whatever gender it is”. (VM4) They discussed women in business, the medical field and politics. The consensus was “that feeling is still out there” but there is a shifting of perceptions concerning women as school leaders. One superintendent stated, “But I think because there are more women involved in the educational process at all levels now that it will get better”. (VM3)

"New" superintendents discussed this question at length. All of the males stated that they did not believe the career pathway was different for men and women. "Maybe we are sensitive, new age American males. I mean, I just don't see barriers to success based on gender". (NM1) They discussed how they felt it was a level "playing field" with the best-qualified candidate being selected for the position. One male discussed that he felt that his perceptions of his female colleagues would be that they would disagree with his statement. They were very interested in how the females in the study would respond to this question.

"New" females were unanimous in their response that they perceived the career pathway for men and women as different. The comments focused on how women seek experiences and plan their pathways to ensure knowledge and skill development to be prepared for the next position.

I think that men who go into education are very serious about education, I believe that they very quickly decide they're going to spend 'X' number of years as a teacher, and then they are going to be this. Women end up in a place, you work hard, you do a great job, you work harder, you do an even better job and then something comes along. (NF3)

Females commented on their perceptions of the career pathways, "men had more "lockstep" positions and women were taking those experiences and kind of seeing where they lead us".

I could be wrong and I could be really biased, but in terms of career pathways, I think for men, I see men as taking opportunities at each step, because it will help them get somewhere. Whereas women, I see taking those opportunities because they can make a contribution or they want more experiences, they can learn more. I see the motivations being very different. (NF3)

The factor of family, the impact of physically being the person who has the baby and the perceptions of supervisors along the way who reacted when female administrators took leaves to have babies were discussed in terms of impact on career pathway.

There was limited discussion on perceptions of communities, Boards of Education, school administrators and other stakeholder groups' acceptance of females as the school systems leader. It was noted that if a culture of female leadership had already been established, then a new female school leader would have an easier time of it. There was agreement that having the skill, knowledge, confidence and outside support network would be essential for success.

Superintendents agreed that the career pathway was directly influenced by the choices made by the individual. When educational and career experiences were diverse and included key areas of development necessary for the knowledge base for the position of superintendent, the pathway could be shorter. It was important to have a good professional reputation in the Capital Region.



## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Summary of Findings*

The purpose of this study was to explore the career pathways of a purposive sample of sixteen superintendents from the Greater Capital Region of New York State and to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives of the experiences that influenced their successful attainment of the superintendency. This was a qualitative study that focused on the phenomena of career pathways to the superintendency. The researcher utilized research instruments and focus group interviews (Krueger, 1994) to collect data on the career pathways and the superintendents' perceptions of the experiences that influenced attainment of the superintendency. The selection criteria utilized years of service and gender as factors. Four focus group categories were established.

The AASA study (Glass, et al., 2000) and NYSCOSS, *Snapshot 2006* (2006) indicated that the majority of superintendents were white, married, and hold advanced degrees. Data collected from the study aligned with the national and state studies. The participants in the study identified their ethnicity as Caucasian, ten (six males and four females) were married, one male was separated, two females were divorced, and two females were single. The sixteen participants all held advanced degrees; eight held doctorates (four males and four females), six (three males and three females) held Certificates of Advanced Study and two held masters degrees.

Data analysis of the data collected through the research instruments and focus group interviews to research question 1 - What were the career pathways of the superintendents? revealed the following findings. The career pathways of superintendents did align with the

AASA study (Glass, et al., 2000), NYSCOSS, *Snapshot 2006*, (2006), and were supported by other studies (Ortiz, 1982; Bjork, Glass & Brunner, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1987). The findings were that superintendents followed a pathway that included teaching, a building level position and a central office position before becoming a superintendent.

Fourteen of the sixteen superintendents did begin their careers as classroom teachers and commented on the importance of understanding instruction as a superintendent. Six new superintendents were teachers; five of the six spent more than ten years in the classroom. This finding indicated an increase in teaching experience for males when compared to the study conducted by Glass, et al. (2000).

The career pathway of veteran superintendents had some commonalities. All of the veteran superintendents began their careers as teachers. Seven held building level positions, four of the participants moved directly to the position of superintendent from a building level position. Four participants held central office positions before becoming superintendent.

Six of the eight veterans had less than six years of teaching experience before moving into an administrative role. Three veteran females had the least number of years in the classroom with an average of four years. This finding indicates that new superintendents both male and female spend more time in the classroom before entering administration and utilized this experience during their superintendency.

Superintendents from small districts were able to make the move from a building level position to the superintendent due to the experiences they had in their prior positions. Both male and females from smaller districts had similar experiences. The small districts where they worked had limited numbers of administrators; therefore they stated during focus groups that there were more opportunities to obtain district-wide experiences.

The career pathways of males and females indicated differences in the number of positions held along the career pathway to the superintendency. Males held four positions and females averaged five positions. Males were in the field of education before becoming a superintendent fifteen (15) to twenty-seven years (27) years and females ranged from seventeen (17) to thirty-four (34) years.

Eleven of the sixteen superintendents were Assistant Superintendents during their career pathway. They stated that they gained the experiences and understandings necessary to be system leaders through this experience. These participants linked their experience in this position with a superintendent for whom they worked who became a mentor. "I had been in the assistant superintendent position with a very mentoring superintendent, who allowed quite a bit of access to what the whole role of superintendent was about"(NF1).

Superintendents agreed that individual experience influenced the career pathway to the superintendency. They did agree that a building level position and/or a central office position before becoming the systems leader was essential for success. Superintendents discussed the importance of mentors, whether it was a superintendent they worked for or someone in the field of education who took a special interest in their career.

Superintendents are willing to relocate to obtain the position with twelve superintendents doing so. Five new superintendents moved to obtain the position as compared to seven "veteran" superintendents. Many of the superintendents expressed an interest in living in the community in which they were the system's leader. Two districts of the eight new superintendents required residency.

According to the most recent study conducted by NYSCOSS, *Snapshot 2006*, (2006) the average age of both genders entering their first superintendency was a mean age of 44.7 for

males and 49.7 for females. The findings revealed that participants' ages for obtaining their first superintendency ranged from thirty-six to fifty-eight years old. New superintendents' ages ranged from thirty-nine to fifty-eight years old when they obtained their first position as a superintendent. The average age for new males was 48.3 years and new females 47.2 years. Veteran superintendents' ages ranged from thirty-six to forty-eight years old for their first superintendency. The mean age of veteran males was 48.5 and females 42.5 years. This result does not match current research. This was a very small sample size and further study was suggested.

The second research question - What were the superintendents' perceptions of their career pathways and the experiences that influenced attainment of the superintendency? The findings indicated that the perspectives of both males and females were similar when questioned about the experiences that influenced successful attainment of the position of superintendent. New superintendents were eager to engage and share their experiences and pathways with an intent interest in listening to each other's story. Veteran superintendents seemed to be engaged in each other's stories as old friends. All discussions were at times light hearted and at other times extremely serious. The most common comment on the reflections was how much the participants in the study enjoyed the time that they spent with other participants and that they would be willing to participate in additional focus group interviews. The researcher noted that both male focus group interviews concluded within the sixty minutes timeframe allocated by the participants. The female focus group interviews were much longer, sometimes lasting two or more hours.

The issue of career path and readiness for the superintendency were appealing topics to the participants. All of the superintendents agreed that diverse and vast experiences in all areas

of district level management and leadership was important. The superintendents strongly encouraged aspiring superintendents to gain diversity of experiences during their career pathway. "It shortens the learning curve and lessens the anxiety once an individual transitions to the superintendency" (NF4).

These experiences should include developing and maintaining an effective school and district staff, fiscal and legal responsibilities, building and facilities planning including construction projects, effective board relationships and understanding the political arena. The skill set mentioned by all participants included interpersonal communication and relationship skills, management of finances and understanding the budget process (Cooper, et al., 2000), and keeping current on federal and state policies and mandates. New females discussed the implications of not having a deep enough understanding of how politics "work". One female focus group discussed the proximity of state government to Capital Region school district and the need to keep up to date on legislative issues.

The superintendents discussed the frustration of politics and the impact on leadership on the system leader. The key factor that caused the most frustration was the amount of time it took to correct or "fix" a local or state political issue. This could involve a misunderstanding between two board members or a new unfunded mandate from state or federal Departments of Education. This was an area that the researcher did not undertake in this study.

The superintendents described the need to have a certain skill set in order to lead a district. The ability to communicate effectively, which includes speaking, listening, reading with comprehension and writing with clarity with many stakeholder groups, was essential for success. The participants noted that effective communication skill was needed with the board of education, unions, employees, school community members, legislatures, and the media. The

superintendents emphasized the need to have a tremendous capacity for work and for learning. Superintendents agreed that integrity, a sense of humor and being thick-skinned were necessary for personal survival.

All of the superintendents spoke about gaining experiences in order to have a global perspective of education and the role of the superintendent as a system leader. The complexity of education law, legalities of personnel, state aid and federal and state mandates required vast and diverse experiences. They spoke of purposefully seeking out opportunities to gain knowledge to fill their own gaps in understanding key areas of district management such as finance, state/federal legislature and personnel. Many discussed the opportunities for learning from colleagues.

The element that every superintendent spoke to was that a system-leader must have a clear vision focused on preparing students for their future. They agreed that if the focus remained on students, decisions were easier to make.

The findings indicated that nine of the sixteen superintendents did not aspire to the position early in their career pathway. Three of the participants indicated that during their career, they made the decision to seek the position. Four of the superintendents, two new superintendents (one male and one female) and two veteran superintendents (two females) decided early in their career to become superintendents. Carlson (1962) describes this as "career-bound". The participants made career decisions based on the goal of obtaining the superintendency. The two new participants were both in their thirties when they accepted their first position as superintendent.

Superintendents agreed with the concept of finding the right "fit" (Tallerico, 2000) for the position in a district. Skill sets, knowledge base, leadership style and personality style was

important for success. Superintendents discussed having the skill or knowledge set that the district lacked in order to lead the district to where they envisioned that they needed to go.

Many of them discussed the need to match their individual needs with the needs of the district so that the “fit” was good, which is consistent with evidence presented by Tallerico (2000). They acknowledged that even though they were all successful in their own districts that being in another district does not guarantee success as a superintendent if the “fit” is not good. Superintendents spoke for the need for the highest level of professionalism within all areas of education.

The findings indicated that females had a common perspective that they needed to identify weaknesses in their skill set for the superintendency so they could purposefully plan their career path for experiences which would support learning in the area of their perceived weakness. Females sought experiences to fill in any perceived gaps in knowledge or experience in order to be very prepared for the superintendency. Female perspectives were that “most men just haphazardly went from one position to another and, voila, became the superintendent”. Females discussed the importance of other people in the field who encouraged them to become superintendents. Both new and veteran females discussed seeking approval or permission to move into administration positions before they entered. The consensus among female participants was that females work harder, were more purposeful in gaining experiences and that there was more career planning involved in obtaining a superintendent position. The male superintendents did not feel that the career pathway for females was any different than their own. One male participant would not answer the question about gender and career pathway. He waved his hand and passed on the opportunity to comment.

### *Conclusions and Recommendations*

Career pathways and experiences that influence the attainment of the superintendency are important to all districts in New York State. It is estimated that sixty percent of the superintendents in the State plan to retire by 2011 (Snapshot VI, 2006). This places an importance on understanding current pathways and experiences. This study attempts to add to the research on career pathways and experiences of superintendents in the Greater Capital Region.

This study hopes to inform public educators of all ages of the importance of making the decision early in the career path to become a system leader. New York State associations such as New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS), the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) and the New York State Association of Women Administrators (NYSAWA) should collectively seek opportunities to contact newly certified administrators. Information concerning career pathway development should be shared so that new administrators understand the steps needed to be successful as the systems leader.

School leaders should seek opportunities and experiences in all areas of district leadership and management to ensure that the experiences support system leadership positions. This includes strategic, organizational and political experiences. There is a need for vast and diverse educational and professional experiences to be prepared for system leadership. This includes diverse experiences in curriculum, instructional methods, personnel management, budgets, and interpersonal communication skills, oral and written communications in private and public settings. Females in this study were adamant in the need to seek opportunities to gain experience and knowledge in the area of budget and politics. School system leadership programs should include an internship with central office administration, especially the assistant superintendent position.



Aspiring superintendents should observe successful leaders in all arenas, especially education to develop strategies and skills for leadership. Future system leaders must always be searching for ways to sustain personal and professional improvement through experiences that influence attainment of the position of superintendent. Reeves (2002) notes that excellent leadership is an acquired skill, not given at birth or developed by childhood; "we define leadership appropriately as the architect of sustained improvement of individual and organizational performance" (p. 4). Skill sets should be systematically developed.

The researcher recommends further study to identify areas of professional development and other learning opportunities suggested by superintendents for aspiring superintendents. The superintendents discussed the importance of continuous learning. Gaining knowledge from being involved in college degree programs, seeking out national or state conferences or professional development workshops helps to maintain understandings of current trends and issues in education. They discussed the importance of having an understanding of teaching and learning with knowledge of curriculum and instruction to support credibility as an educational leader.

People who aspire to the superintendency need to be prepared to be public figures. It was noted a number of times that the public's perceptions about the role of the system leader and the actualities of the position were always shifting. This factor makes success a day-to-day management issue. One superintendent noted, "I don't usually chew gum and one day I was and the comment was made by a community member, 'I have no respect for that person chewing gum in public'"(NF). Individuals need to understand the need for management of self. Non-negotiable factors for success include integrity, confidentiality, ethical behavior and personal management of behavior.

### *Recommendation for Further Study*

The questions addressed in this study need further exploration and expanded conversations with a larger group of participants are needed to gain a deeper understanding of the career pathways of superintendents. This would include focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews and extensive study of experiences that influenced their pathways. Further study should include participants from an ethnically diverse background to identify if the career pathways are different in substantive ways.

Further conversations are recommended with superintendents to determine if there are common experiences, mentors or educational experiences that influence attainment of the superintendent position. Exploration into common affiliations with networking groups, colleges, and professional associations may indicate similarities or differences among superintendents.

Further study on gender, race and ethnicity issues, among new superintendents is recommended, which may reveal factors, mentors, and people who influenced the attainment of the position of superintendent. Factors of aspiration and motivation of participants should be investigated through the lens of gender. A larger sample should be invited to participate.

The researcher recommends continued research on the impact of mentoring on leadership. This research should examine mentoring through the lens of gender.

Another recommendation involves further study on the impact of leadership teams in districts with new superintendents. How do existing central office administrations affect the success of a new superintendent? How do factors of leadership style and management style affect the success of the district? What is the impact on student achievement due to conflict or support of new superintendents? Further study should seek to understand the perspectives of

factors that caused the failure of new superintendents and the impact of central office leadership on new superintendent's tenure in the district.

There is also a need for further study on the impact of the current fiscal crisis and the rate of retirement of school leaders. Are current superintendents postponing retirement due to financial loss of retirement accounts or the uncertainty of the world economy? This would have an impact on many factors of the career pathway and opportunities for aspiring superintendents.

The study of career pathways and the factors that impact the successful attainment of the superintendency is important information for all stakeholders such as schools of education, educational associations and school systems involved in educating, supporting and hiring school leaders. Continued scholarly research in this area will provide valuable information for aspiring superintendents and school systems.

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## APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

To: Career Pathway Study Participants:

My name is Kitty Summers and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at The Sage Colleges, Troy, New York. I am inquiring if you would participate in a research project on the career pathways of New York State school superintendents.

The purpose of this study is to explore the evolution of career pathways of current New York State Superintendents and factors that may affect access to this position. The qualitative study will utilize a questionnaire, focus group interview and follow up reflection questions.

Participation will involve a willingness to discuss your experiences, perspective and professional journey to the position of Superintendent. The time commitment will range from 60 - 90 minutes. The small focus group (4-6 participants) interview will be audio and video recorded with your permission for the purpose of accuracy. Your participation is voluntary and all responses will be confidential. Volunteers may withdraw from the study at any point.

Participants will not receive any form of compensation. My research focuses on exploring the career pathways of new and veteran superintendents and documenting if the pathway has changed over time. I will document factors that may affect access to this position.

If you have any questions about the study, or me please let me know. I can be reached by e-mail at [summek@sage.edu](mailto:summek@sage.edu) or telephone (518) 470-3864. My faculty chair for this research is Dr. James Butterworth, who can be contacted at The Sage Colleges by e-mail [buttej@sage.edu](mailto:buttej@sage.edu) or telephone (518) 244-2326. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kitty Summers

## APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

### *Research Instrument*

#### Focus Group - Questionnaire

**Directions:** Please take a few minutes to complete the following questions. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide some basic information to the researcher and to identify your career pathway to the Superintendentcy. Your responses will be confidential and will not be shared with other participants in the study. Questionnaires and your individual responses will be destroyed upon completion of the research. Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals will not receive any form of compensation. Thank you for your time and participation. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher, Kitty Summers by e-mail [summek@sage.edu](mailto:summek@sage.edu) or by telephone 518 470 3864 or contact the Faculty Chairperson for this study, Dr. James Butterworth at the School of Education, Sage Colleges by e-mail [buttej@sage.edu](mailto:buttej@sage.edu) or by telephone 518 469 5032.

#### Section 1: Participant Profile

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_  
Present Age \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_  
Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
2. Present District \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Type of District \_\_\_ Rural \_\_\_ Suburban \_\_\_ Urban
  - b. Total Student Enrollment \_\_\_\_\_
3. Total Years as a Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_ Number of Districts served \_\_\_\_\_
4. Please list all previous Superintendent Positions **starting with the most recent first** (in descending order)  
District \_\_\_\_\_ Year(s) Employed \_\_\_\_\_  
District \_\_\_\_\_ Year(s) Employed \_\_\_\_\_  
District \_\_\_\_\_ Year(s) Employed \_\_\_\_\_  
District \_\_\_\_\_ Year(s) Employed \_\_\_\_\_  
What was **your** age when you obtained your **first Superintendent position**? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Highest Degree Earned?  
Masters \_\_\_\_\_ Institution \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_  
CAS \_\_\_\_\_ Institution \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctorate \_\_\_\_\_ Institution \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_
6. Please list your career pathway to the Superintendentcy/Include all positions held to date:
  - a. Position \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Position \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Position \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_
- d. Position \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_
- e. Position \_\_\_\_\_ District \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ Years of Service \_\_\_\_

7. What position most prepared you for the Superintendency?

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8. Does your current district require you to live in the district? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

9. Have you relocated to accept a new position? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

10. Do you have school-aged children? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

11. Please describe any special circumstances you have encountered during your career pathway.

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12. Would you choose the same career pathway to Superintendent? \_\_\_yes \_\_\_no

Why or why not?

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13. In your opinion, what career pathway is the **best** for success for the position of Superintendent?

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Thank you for completing this Questionnaire. We will now begin the Focus Group Interview.

## APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP REFLECTIONS

### Focus Group - Reflection

Instructions: Please take a moment to reflect on the focus group discussion. Please record any additional thoughts, comments, issues and questions that you would like to share. Again, thank you for your contributions to this research study. I appreciate your time and insights. Please return in the attached envelope.

1. What ideas or themes were most interesting to you?
2. Identify any issues that you reflected on and why?
3. Where there any issues you strongly disagreed/agreed with and why?
4. Please share any additional comments:

## APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Research Instrument* Focus Group – Interview

Interview Protocol: The focus group discussion is designed to explore the evolution of career pathways of current New York State Superintendents and factors that may affect access to this position. The following questions will be asked of each of the four focus groups and are meant to encourage rich dialogue on your experiences during your own journey to the position of Superintendent. Thank you for participating in this discussion. Please know that participation is voluntary and you may withdrawal at any time.

1. What was the process that you went through leading up to the decision to apply for the position of Superintendent? Please describe.
2. What kinds of opportunities and benefits do you recall during your career that helped your career pathway?
3. What kinds of obstacles and barriers do you recall during your career that hindered your career pathway?
4. What factors supported your successful attainment of your **first** superintendent position?
5. Is your current position of Superintendent what you anticipated? Please explain.
6. Would you become a Superintendent if you had to do over again?
7. What if any, external factors have most affected the position of Superintendent?
8. What if any, internal factors have most affected the position of Superintendent?
9. What are the skills, knowledge and experiences that are necessary for success in this position? Please explain in detail.
10. What do you think is the most direct career pathway to Superintendency? Please explain in detail.
11. Do you believe the career pathway has changed since you have become a Superintendent? Please explain and indicate what factors caused the change.
12. Do you believe the career pathway is different for men and women? Please explain in detail.
13. Could you have taken a more direct route to Superintendent? What factors influenced your pathway?
14. Was there one person or factor that influenced your access to the Superintendency the most? Please explain.
15. Did your college experience or a particular program influence your access to the Superintendency the most? Please explain.

Are there any other comments you would like to share? Thank you for your time and discussion. I truly appreciate the sharing of your experiences.