Factors Influencing the Access of Women to the Superintendency

In Public Education

Angela M. Friebolin

PhD Program in Strategic Leadership & Administrative Studies, Marywood University

SLAS 6013- Qualifying Seminar, Fall 2024

Dr. Alexander Dawoody

November 29, 2024

Abstract

The unequal representation of women in the highest leadership positions is a phenomenon that persists in the field of education. Women occupy the majority of teaching positions, yet fail to attain the office of the superintendency at a rate commensurate with their percentage in the classroom. Studies show the career trajectory of women continues to differ from that of their male counterparts and women are frequently poorly positioned for the offices which are typically the pipelines to becoming a superintendent. The factors which influence this phenomenon are work and family obligations, glass ceiling, patriarchal structure and gatekeeping practices, to name a few. Recommendations for change are explored.

Key words: Superintendency, women, glass ceiling, public education, gatekeeper theory

Table of Contents

Introduction

The American education system is a stalwart institution in our nation, providing high-quality instruction and opportunities for our children from east to west. Dating back to the nation's first public school building, *The Boston Latin School*, in 1635, our national paradigm of the structure of education has been evolving and expanding (Lisa, 2020). According to Wendy Paterson of Buffalo State, "Public education, common in New England, was class-based, and the working class received few benefits, if any. Instructional styles and the nature of the curriculum were locally determined. Teachers themselves were expected to be models of strict moral behavior" (Paterson, 2022). After the Revolutionary War, Thomas Jefferson began to craft his vision of a public education system which was funded by taxpayer dollars. Although this concept did not come to fruition until the 1800s, his forethought set the stage for future local educational boards and publicly-funded school opportunities (Chen, 2021).

Early examples of public education were largely reserved for white children and were executed through a hodgepodge of modalities. Students "were excluded on the basis of income, race or ethnicity, gender, geographic location, and other reasons, "(CEP, 2020). With its origins in the New England area, by the 1840s, generalized education "had diffused rapidly among the free residents of the world's greatest nineteenth century democracy" (Goldin, 1999). By some estimates, the per capita enrollment of primary school students in the United States had by this point exceeded that of Germany and the U.S. was on its way to becoming the most well-educated populace in the world.

Recent student-targeted foci within the field include an emphasis on education with a trauma-aligned lens, as well as a generalized and much-needed push for equity across all elements of the student experience in our schools. With efforts aimed at equity and equality

across student populations and a focus on leveling the playing field for the learner, there still remains a gap in the pursuit of equality for the educator in terms of opportunities for career advancement for the female educator. Even with all the gains made on behalf of women in many facets of life, why has the leadership differential persisted for so long in the field of education? Women still occupy the majority of teaching positions, but the gender split is not ……

Of those females who do reach the goal of working as a central office administrator, many enter the department of curriculum which is not always a path to the superintendency in the same manner as the assistant superintendent would be. With these statistics in mind, it is clear that there is an obstacle to overcome for females interested in career advancement in the field of education. As author Tanya Tarbutton points out, "there is no shortage of female educators; however, there is a shortage of female leaders" (2019).

Review of Literature

Looking purely at numbers and comparing between genders, one may ask the question as to whether this is a supply-and-demand problem, a problem of available talent, bias, or are they just not getting hired? Statistics on degrees earned seem to point away from a talent issue. "Federal data show that women earn around two-thirds of all leadership degrees in education, usually the foundational credential needed to advance to the principalship. There seem to be plenty of qualified, talented, and even credentialed women leaders, but relatively few of them ever advance to the superintendency" (Sawchuck, 2022).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2018 female teachers made up 76% of all classroom educators (NCES, 2021). We do tend to see a lower percentage of male teachers (11%) at the elementary level as compared to the secondary level (36%). Even when

adjusting for the elementary/secondary difference, the ratio is still inverted when examining

gender and the principalship. There are over 37,057 high school principals currently employed

in the United States. 35.9% of all high school principals are women, while 64.1% are men

(Zippia.com, 2022). Examining historical trends in district leadership positions will reveal an

inequitable representation of women in these roles as compared to overall percentage in the

profession (Glass, 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009). Although women represent 76% of all

classroom teachers, they occupy only just over 50% of overall principalships and fewer than

25% of superintendent positions (Kowalski et al., 2011). Nationwide data show women

comprise more than 50 percent of the graduate students enrolled in educational leadership or

administration programs. Additionally, women also are earning the doctorate in educational

leadership areas at rates which are comparable to their male counterparts (Glass, 2000).

The discrepancy is even more apparent when we examine the rates of ascension from

building-level leadership to the superintendency. The disparity in gender representation among

superintendents has been a longstanding issue in educational leadership, where men have

traditionally held the majority of these roles.   For years, men have significantly outnumbered

women in superintendent roles across both large and small districts. Despite some gradual

progress, women accounted for only 24.1 percent Of the nation's 7194 school superintendents

during the 2022-23 school year (Kowalski et al., 2011). To bolster the inequality argument, it

should be noted that in 2023, women earned 83.6% of what men earned (BLS, 2024). A 2017

study by the American Association of School Administrators showed that "94% of female

superintendents earned on average $2100 less than their male counterparts" (Tarbutton, 2019).

This trend tended to creep into institutions of higher education, where females unfortunately

earned an average of 11.4% less than males occupying similar professional positions. Further

complicating this trend, according to the NCES, is that women are outpacing men in acquiring degrees at every level, from bachelor's to doctorates (2013). Why, then, does female employment not keep pace with their levels of education? The answer is complex, but all explanations point to a level of institutionalized gender bias which still pervades the office spaces of our schools.

When considering the move from classroom teacher to educational administration, the decision whether or not to move into the principalship may be a component of the phenomenon wherein women represent a lower percentage of administrators in public education. The principalship, by its nature in the hierarchy of educational administration, is a necessary step on the pathway to the superintendency and indeed required for the Superintendent PK-12 endorsement in Pennsylvania (PDE, 2024). The traditional route in Pennsylvania holds requirements for a graduate program intended for the superintendency as well as three years of administrative or supervisory experience. For this reason, female administrators' decision to enter the career progression at the level of the principalship is the determining factor in their eventual ability to rise to the highest seat in any school district (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

In public education, like many professions, the ladder of promotion is linear with little opportunity for career change from classroom teaching unless one wishes to pursue the path of administration. Once in administration, building-level administrators then funnel into the next tier of district office administration, largely consisting of superintendents and assistant superintendents. Author Flora Ortiz outlines the typical career path to the superintendency in an ethnographic study of public school administrators and describes the career flow as beginning with teacher, to assistant principal, to secondary principal (middle or high school), then assistant superintendent, and finally superintendent (1982). This is a path of compounded influence and

one of a two-pronged hierarchy. As an individual advances the career pathway of educational

administration, he or she experiences a greater degree of responsibility and ability to demonstrate

one's leadership capacity. Concurrently with this phenomenon, upward career advancement in

educational administration puts the employee in a greater position of influence over more

essential areas of the school district. As the influence increases the administrator enjoys an

elevated authority over other employees and a greater ability to affect and access those

responsible for central district functions. (Ortiz, 1892).

Edgar Schein (1971) provides a conceptualization of career mobility within an

organization and how this compounded responsibility and influence may impact a route to the

position of superintendent. Schein describes three types of organizational movement within a

school system as circumferential, vertical, and radial. In circumferential movement, an

employee's title and possibly nature of work may change but that individual is still hovering in

the same circumference and relative position to the centrality of the organization. An example of

circumferential career movement in educational administration would be a school principal

moving to a similar-level administrative role within the same school district, but in a different

department, such as curriculum development or personnel management. Vertical motion in an

organization may include retaining one's job responsibilities, title, and relative position in the

leadership hierarchy, but with the addition of responsibilities which may provide an impression

of authority over members of the group. A good example of this in education is when a teacher

assumes the added responsibility of becoming a department head, or takes initiative in creating

curriculum materials. There is a change in the scope and possibly nature of work, but no defined

advancement per se. Radial career motion is perhaps the most influential type of career

movement and is described as a change in the centrality of an employee resulting in a closer

proximity to the leaders of the organization, primarily the superintendent and board of directors. In this type of career movement, the employee experiences elevated responsibilities and enjoys a broader impact within the organization. A typical example in schools is the promotion of a building principal to assistant superintendent.

A number of studies on this phenomenon have pinpointed the secondary principalship as a prime position to occupy on the path en route to the superintendency (Glass, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Kim & Brunner, 2009). To this point, Ortiz (1982) suggests that the secondary principalship promotes organizational experience including circumferential, vertical, and radial movements, thus placing secondary principals in a prime position within the hierarchical route to the highest office. This placement in the continuum of power in a school district promotes socialization within the power structure with a shift in focus from teaching students to managing adults and conducting administrative duties, putting them in close proximity to other administrators. Radial movement is introduced into this power schematic as the purview of the secondary principalship customarily extends beyond the academic and supervisory role into extracurricular activities and sports, allowing enhanced contact with members of the community, such as members of the Board of Education, and other leaders of the school district, such as the superintendent and assistant superintendent.

The proximity to the centrality of leadership appears to have a great impact on the order of the succession line in public schools (Ortiz, 1982). While all building-level administrators require some type of credentialing or certification and all provide oversight and maintain authority over other employees within their assignment, assistant superintendents and those holding director positions have a much greater frequency of interactions with the superintendent and school board and therefore an increased influence over the entire organization. High school

and, to a lesser extent, middle school principals maintain a high degree of visibility at programming during and after the school day, allowing for an increased presence of leadership. Elementary principals do not enjoy this same level of exposure and do not experience the same degree of collisions with community and leadership, resulting in less visibility and proximity to the centrality of power. For this reason, elementary principal positions are more likely than secondary positions to become terminal placements in education. Career positioning is a concept seen in many professional arenas, but of paramount significance in career tracks of women in education. In the narrowing path to the superintendency, one's chances of reaching the top seat increase based on a specific career trajectory. According to Sharp, et al., women who are hired as principals are hired in greater numbers at the elementary level (2004).

Research consistently pinpoints the high school principalship as a key position in this career progression. "Few women apply for and are hired for high school principal positions, yet it is the number one position from which one ascends to the superintendency" (Sharp, et al., 2004). Further research on this trend reveals that the superintendency is also closely associated with the position of athletic director, and men are three times as likely than women to be hired as athletic directors (Maranto, et al., 2018). This fact leads to more questions than answers, as to the exact reasons for this discrepancy are not well understood.

An analysis of the administrative positions held by superintendents and their career progressions in education revealed that the high school principalship was the most common position held, 45.5% (Kowalski et al., 2011). Secondary principalship holds strong significance in the career progression in education due concretely to the position's visibility and resulting positive impressions from school boards (Tallerico, 2000). There is, however, a noteworthy difference between the experiences of male and female superintendents' career history with

respect to the principal position at the high school level as observed by author Thomas Glass in a 2000 study. According to this research, in the year 2000 the career progression of superintendents revealed that 51.2% of males and 18.5% of females previously held the position of high school principal (Glass et al., 2000). There is evidence to suggest that recent sampling studies relying on voluntary responses of current or former superintendents and may not completely describe the career progression of females who reach the superintendency, and there may be a lower percentage of females who pass through the position of secondary principal on their way to the office (Kowalski et al., 2011). More research is needed in this area to fully understand the complexities of the phenomenon.

Men also tend to be promoted at a greater rate than women in education. As in most professions, the path to the top is a pyramid, with narrowing opportunities as one ascends the ranks. "Men advance from entry-level leadership positions to advanced leadership positions at an accelerated rate compared to women. Barriers such as these are thought to have an impact on women's leadership opportunities" (Tarbutton, 2019). With men occupying positions which are frequently on the trajectory to the superintendency compounded with a more rapid rate of promotion, women must work harder and faster to keep up with their male counterparts.

Analysis

"The Glass Ceiling" Phenomenon

A brief examination of a few of the barriers presented to women encountering leadership roles will further underscore the unlevel field on which females are competing with their male counterparts. It is impossible to do any amount of research on female leadership status without encountering discussions on "the glass ceiling." Management consultant Marilyn Loden coined

this iconic and descriptive phrase in 1978 during a women's panel discussion on their

aspirations. Marilyn struggled to hold her composure as the female panelists painted their goals

and desires in a largely self-deprecating manner, such as having poor self-esteem and lack of

socialization. Loden instead "argued that the 'invisible glass ceiling' - the barriers to

advancement that were cultural not personal - was doing the bulk of the damage to women's

career aspirations and opportunities" (Loden, 2017).

The United States Department of Labor's Glass Ceiling Commission was active from

1991 through 1996. This commission has recognized the glass ceiling to the degree of actually

providing it an official definition as "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or

organizational barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their

organizations into managerial level" (US DOL, 1991). Author Joan C. Williams, in her article

Hitting the Maternal Wall, describes various ways in which the glass ceiling is manifested for

women who pursue academic careers. Williams points out that "Women professionals may have

to try harder than men to be perceived as competent because their mistakes are remembered long

after men are forgotten" (2010). To further compound this phenomenon, women may have to

work harder to even be perceived as competent, while men frequently have to demonstrate more

overt examples of incompetence before being assigned the label of incompetent. This is a

constant battle for women in the workplace.

Loden continues her work to educate and rectify the systemic and internal prejudices

which result in the invisible yet ever-present barriers for women in pursuit of high-level

leadership positions. She recalls a situation early in her career, when, as a high-ranking human

resources official in her company, her boss would continuously comment that she should "smile

more", making comments about her appearance nearly every day. Additionally, as the better

candidate during a competition for a promotion, Loden was passed over in favor of the male candidate. In Loden's words, "Once I was told that despite my better performance record, a promotion I was hoping for was going to a male peer. The reason given was that he was a "family man" - that he was the main breadwinner and so needed the money more" (Loden, 2017). This type of blatant gender discrimination has diminished since Loden's early career, but is still present in many organizations. Given the path of uneven progress for women since the coining of the "glass ceiling" phrase, another metaphor has been suggested for women's progress, that of a labyrinth. According to author Alice Eagly,

> Unlike a glass ceiling, a labyrinth allows some women to reach high levels of leadership, yet the walls of the labyrinth remain in place to challenge the women who follow. If the paths that men take are construed as an open road (perhaps with a few potholes along the way), the labyrinth that women traverse presents perhaps a more difficult path (2020).

To add another layer to this labyrinth or glass ceiling, whichever is the preferred metaphor, occupational segregation is present in a large majority of high-level organizations which further marginalizes females looking to advance their employment options. There are higher percentages of women executives in specific areas, such as personnel, finance specialty areas, and public relations, which are subsets of the business world not typically tapped to fill the most powerful management posts. On the contrary, men overwhelmingly opt for the path of the business mainstream where women are few and far between. "While there are indeed women who have reached high management positions, they are often viewed, given their scarcity, as simply "tokens" that corporate management cannot be accused of discrimination" (Jakobsh, 2012).

Work and Family Obligations

Along with the well-established and documented effects of the glass ceiling, other sociological and cultural factors may be at work against women administrators. Women are far more likely to be asked about and judged for their family commitments. Facing both explicit and implicit biases during the interview process, females may be asked in both overt and subtle ways about their family status and obligation in the household.

> "One woman leader who requested anonymity described what happened when she was a finalist for a city school district search in 2020. After several rounds of strong interviews, board members' attitudes changed almost immediately after the candidate mentioned that she would be driving home on weekends to visit her daughter, who was completing high school in another district about 200 miles away" (Sawchuck, 2022).

Such an arrangement would be commonplace for a man, yet this female candidate was further questioned and the board members implied that this arrangement might mean she would not be fully committed to the position. To make matters worse, her daughter was watching the interview on television and was horrified to have become the focus of the conversation. It is doubtful such an interrogation would have occurred to a male candidate. Sharon Contreras, former superintendent of Guilford County Schools in North Carolina, urges boards and hiring organizations to reconsider such long-standing traditions for superintendent selection which tend to disfavor women. "In her view, the process of parading superintendent finalists in front of the board in successive public meetings amounts to a big popularity contest that doesn't actually do much to illuminate the specific skills and strengths candidates bring to the job" (Sawchuck, 2022).

The concept of male hegemony is frequently asserted as a prevailing reason why women end up in the apex seat of the school district at a ratio of 1:4 as compared to men. Hegemony refers to leadership or dominance, especially by one or social group over others. This appears to be a paradoxical situation for female administrators, as illustrated by one study in the Greater Toronto Area school system wherein multiple elementary principalships were analyzed along with input from faculty. Ironically, even though female elementary teachers far outnumber males, women as principals were not as widely accepted as males. This opens an interesting set of questions as to whether the female teachers are more comfortable being led by a man (MacKinnon, 2024).

Another prominent reason for dwindling numbers of female leaders as we climb the employment pyramid is the obvious tension women experience while endeavoring to master the precarious balance of family obligations and work commitment. In an article in the Harvard Business Review, authors Robin Ely and Irene Padavic discuss what they term the "psychic tensions" women experience in the workplace. According to the work/family narrative and broader cultural notions, a woman's commitment to family is primary by nature, so her commitment to her work has to become secondary (Ely and Padavic, 2020). The author duo worked with a specific legal firm for 18 months to immerse themselves into the culture of the firm and further study the phenomenon of underrepresentation of females in high-level positions. Out of 107 interviews conducted with individuals in all departments and levels, virtually every conversation reverted in some way back to the work/family narrative and when attempting to explain the dearth of female partners (Ely & Padavic, 2020). While the issue is multi-faceted, for this company a great deal of the problem had to do with the general overwhelm both men and women experience in today's culture. While both genders were overworked, the women were

encouraged and given the opportunity to take accommodations such as going part-time and shifting to "internally facing roles" which in turn ended up derailing their careers.

In general, the very real phenomenon exists wherein women may work full-time and beyond, yet are still largely responsible for home management concerns. Even with high-profile roles in the workplace, "in addition to the roles they hold at their companies, they remain the primary caretakers for their families" (Elmuti, D., Jia, H., & Davis, H., 2009). As the constraints and responsibilities of work life and home life further squeeze the female professional, she often finds herself having to choose between family obligations and career aspirations. Childcare and family needs are typically at their apex precisely during women's peak years of opportunity in the professional world, and women may experience great conflict about leaving family during these years (Ho & Hallman, 2016).

Women who do successfully pursue the superintendency experience challenges and barriers with respect to work-life and work-relationship balance. According to Reed & Patterson, there is evidence that women superintendents are more likely to be single or unmarried (widowed or divorced) than their male counterparts (2007). Nicole White, PhD candidate at Marquette University in 2017, conducted a very interesting study involving the work-life balance of female superintendents with children. Her dissertation included interviews with the aforementioned female superintendents using the lens of Catherine Hakim's *Preference Theory* wherein females' reproductive choices, and thereby career choices, actually represent a choice in the era of reproductive technology. Prior to conscious reproduction, women were often at the mercy of the reproductive rhythm of the family. Hakim categorizes women's paid work preferences into three areas: *home-centered* (about 20%), *adaptive*, (about 60%), and *work-centered* (about 20%). She cites lifestyle factors which influence market factors, thereby

resulting in a specific woman's preference for unpaid home work or paid work, or somewhere on the continuum. The argument is centered upon the fact that when contraception allowed for large-scale control over fertility, women experienced a renaissance in their ability to choose and manage career paths. Even with women obtaining high-level accreditations and degrees at historical rates, men still fall into the work-centered category at far higher percentages than women. Three-quarters of women would prefer to work but work a part-time job, but few professional part-time jobs are available to them, therefore they find themselves in the full-time adaptive work category (Hakim, 2003). Based on Hakim's study, women who present preference for home-centered or adaptive lifestyles are more likely to remain married or cohabitate. Academic criticism of Hakim's theory points out that there is little description of the role of societal preferences and gender bias in the fact that many women are "forced" into one of the three categories due to lack of choice. The bottom line is, even though choice exists for women in managing the work-life balance, it remains a limited choice at best.

Gender bias is alive and well among educational administrators, sometimes subtle and sometimes blatant. According to Jackie Blount's landmark work *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency*,

> Being good wives and mothers also meant that women generally needed to put their families' needs before their own. These expectations tended to limit married women's career possibilities outside the home because school boards and administrators held married women's family duties against them when considering candidates for promotion (Blount, 1998, p. 128).

While men were and still are able to conduct business and network outside of business hours, women are generally subject to a higher degree of scrutiny and marked difficulty cracking the

"old boys network." Margaret Grogan sums up the bias neatly in stating, "What is revealed powerfully is that women aspirants to the superintendency are seen as women first and administrators second" (1996, p. 107).

White's study serves to further illuminate the perception disparity and gender bias at work in educational administration. For this research, four women superintendents were identified and given in-depth interviews in an attempt to further describe their approaches to work and family demands. The women all met the following criteria: licensed in the state of Wisconsin, in their first five years of the superintendency, female, and having children. All of the women were between the ages of 40 and 49 years, and their children ranged in age from a preschooler to a young adult child. Three were married and one was engaged to be married after a divorce at an earlier age (White, 2017).

Although these women all took different career paths which eventually led to the superintendency, they all describe similar struggles and challenges. Three of them self-categorized as work-focused and acknowledged that not doing so may be tantamount to showing weakness, a trait which is not compatible with a high-level executive in education (White, 2017). Three of the women also gave credit to their spouses and family, pointing out that without their extreme support the accomplishments would not have been possible. One of the women, extremely driven to complete her doctorate while still allowing for quality time with her husband, recalls his lack of support for her and her professional endeavors. At one point, after a neighbor had congratulated her on the completion of her PhD, her husband pointed out to the neighbor that she "wasn't a real doctor." She ended up divorcing him and (as of the writing) is engaged to a fellow superintendent from another local district who understands her career path and devotion to work.

Institutionalized Patriarchal Structure and Gender-Based Harassment

Despite the recent *Me Too* movement and advancements in the status of female complainants in sexual harassment disputes, workplace harassment and sexual discrimination still persists for many candidates looking to advance in their fields (Ho & Hallman, 2016). Even though illegal, it is puzzling to believe that some companies advertise gender preference for some positions. A blatant example is an employment ad from 2015 indicating the open position "requires filling in the responsibilities of a receptionist, so female candidates are preferred" (Crockett, 2015). Additionally, according to 2015 data from the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the decision was settled in favor of the person who initiated the charge in over 30,000 cases dealing with sex discrimination (2016). The institutionalized patriarchal value structure may permit men to believe that they can control women, and feminists argue that "preconceived notions of gender roles are central to this understanding; they lead to a wide range of rules pertaining to gender determined behaviors and expectations. Society's acceptance of these rules sets up the rationale for male supremacy and potential for male harassment or violence against women" (Jakobsh, 2012).

Sex discrimination and harassment in the workplace can present at all levels yet become increasingly magnified and concentrated as females climb the power hierarchy. In the recent case of *King v. Acosta*, an employer blatantly identified in court that he paid a female executive half as much as her male counterparts even though they had commensurate sales numbers and these numbers were a key determinant in salary calculations (King v. Acosta, 2012). While laws exist for such cases, they frequently only have the opportunity to address the most egregious cases thereby allowing thousands of female workers existing in similar unaddressed circumstances (Ho & Hallman, 2016). In the political arena, media coverage of male versus

female candidates frequently focuses on different elements such as trivial items for the women. In a cumulative effect, microaggressions may occur in the office setting which result in an overall hostile and unwelcoming environment for women. Microaggressions are low-level, sometimes barely perceptible actions and/or words directed at individuals which, over time, build up to cause discouragement and perceived unfair treatment.

The Gatekeeper Theory

The Gatekeeper Theory as applied to the field of education aims to contribute to the understanding of the pervasive problem of underrepresentation of women in the superintendency. In short, this theory holds that "gatekeepers such as school board members and search firm consultants control the gates and channels of the superintendent selection process through which a candidate must navigate that result more favorably for men than women" (Bernal, 2019). The understanding of the concept of a "gatekeeper" in any context originates in a 1943 study by Kurt Lewin examining the reluctance of homemakers to prepare and serve particular types of meat to their families. Lewin understood that it was the wives, not the husbands and children, who made the decisions as to what was served for dinner, therefore the women were indeed the "gatekeepers" of the flow of food into the home (Lewin, 1943). The same framework can also be applied to the selection process for the superintendency, as men and women frequently experience paths with different degrees of complexity in pursuit of the position. Ultimately, societal prejudices and other factors influence the decisions of the "gatekeepers" to allow or disallow candidates to proceed forward through the interview and selection process. Even with comparable or superior credentials, women are less likely to advance and earn the top spot (Tallerico, 2000)

When school districts are in search of a new superintendent, search firms and school board members are the primary sources serving as gatekeepers to the office. According to Lisa Elliot of the National School Boards Association, "the typical school board member today is white [78 percent] and male [52 percent]" (2020, para.6). Moreover, most superintendent search consultants are white men, retired university professors in education, or retired superintendents themselves (Tallerico, 2000).

School boards, when advertising and creating descriptions of positions, assign value to a grouping of professional experiences and candidate attributes. Many school boards show preference for individuals with prior work as a superintendent, however, when they are open to reviewing the credentials of candidates without explicit superintendent experience (as in the case of a new or first-time superintendent) they are likely to value experience in the high school principalship and will consider these candidates (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). This is tantamount to a gatekeeping practice, restricting access and creating a filter as fewer women serve as high school principals (Shakeshaft, 1989).

The Leadership Style and Perception Paradox

Myriad studies and theories exist with respect to successful leadership. According to authors Yasir, Rabia, Muhammad, Noor, and Muhammed "Available literature provides evidence that the business environment is changing rapidly and becoming impulsive and volatile" (2016, p.1). For this reason, a highly-desirable and efficacious leadership style in such an environment is one in which the leader will pivot and adapt to such change. Leaders must inspire trust from their followers, which will ultimately pave the way for organizational change. We know from previous research that leadership is a key factor for successful transformation of an organization (Kotter, 1995). Author Peter Northouse notes in his text *Leadership: Theory*

and Practice that since the 1980s there has been a surge of research regarding the transformational approach to leadership. Transformational leadership is "concerned with emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals" (Northouse, 2019, p.163).

A subset of research dealing with the effectiveness of transformational leadership is the relatively new concept of Organizational Change Capacity (OCC). Author and researcher Richard Soparnot and colleagues "define organizational change capacity as an organization's ability to develop and implement appropriate organizational changes to constantly adapt to its environment" (2011). Although somewhat nebulous to define, OCC deals with an organization's ability to adapt, pivot, and expand its competencies to allow the entity to survive the change process, whether internal or external. In the dynamic landscape of organizational environments today, strong OCC is associated with success and evolution (Yasir, *et al*., 2016).

Professor William Q. Judge, Jr. is the E.V. Williams Chair of Strategic Leadership and Professor of Strategic Management in the Management Department at the College of Business & Public Administration at Old Dominion University. He, along with numerous colleagues, has done multitudinous research in the area of organizational change effectiveness and the most appropriate leadership style to facilitate it. Judge and fellow researcher Thomas Douglas have identified eight dimensions dealing with OCC-type leadership (2009). These dimensions are distinct yet interrelated, and include "issues of formal organizational processes, informational organizational culture and human capabilities" (Yasir, *et al*., 2016). The following dimensions were identified: trustworthy leadership, innovative culture, involved mid-management, trusting followers, capable champions, system thinking, effective communication, and accountable culture (Judge & Douglas, 2009). Based on research and theory asserted by Long & Mao (2008) as well as Northouse (2007), it is evident that the style of transformational leadership is the best

suited for a situation requiring the change process. Leaders who embody transformational attributes are able to shepherd their followers through organizational change through an interactive leadership style. Transformational leadership is positively associated with high OCC competencies and it is suggested that leaders must incorporate and adopt the behaviors of transformational leadership style to experience success when implementing organizational change (Lutz Allen, Smith, & DaSilva., 2013).

Research into the alignment of leadership attributes across gender lines reveals that women demonstrate desirable leader-follower characteristics as suggested through the Organizational Change Capacity framework. A very recent study out of Pakistan looked into female leaders of advertising agencies, fashion businesses, and educational institutions, their relationships to followers, and followers' perception of said leadership styles and outcomes. The authors interviewed 366 employees and through a survey-based questionnaire they were able to construct cross-sectional data. The results are positive and promising with respect to the potential of women leaders, citing "the results indicate that women's transformational leadership fosters trust, connectivity and innovative behaviour in the employees. Further, the results supported that employees' trust in their leader and connectivity mediate the relationship between women's leadership and innovative behaviour of the employees" (Bilal, Ahmad, Muhammad, J & Ragif, 2021).

It is widely accepted that employees' trust in their leadership is a critical component in the overall effectiveness of an organization (Chughati, Byrne, & Flood, 2015). Earlier research into this vein of leadership efficacy shows that trust encompasses followers' assumptions and beliefs about possible positive outcomes of others' expected behavior. Subsequent studies have shown that "when employers act in a way that builds respect, pride, and confidence in their

followers, they will be trusted" (Gillespie & Mann, 2004). Transformational leaders are defined by demonstrating support for individual employees and support for group goals. Employees who perceive their leaders to be demonstrating transformational characteristics are more likely to have a higher degree of trust, thereby promoting and supporting change (Yasir, *et al*., 2016). Additionally, according to a 2021 online piece from the American Psychological Association, "women are slightly more likely to be 'transformational' leaders, serving as role models, helping employees develop their skills, and motivating them to be dedicated and creative" (When the Boss, 2021).

How do gender differences in leadership contribute to overall effectiveness? An examination of leaders with respect to gender roles yields numerous studies. A 2020 study published in the Harvard Business Review discusses "7 Leadership Lessons Men Can Learn from Women." While not intended to imply a "better" leadership style for either gender on holistic grounds, it examines situation-specific traits which may manifest in the leadership process which would be more beneficial in certain circumstances. The authors start with the common yet erroneous supposition that in order to be successful, women should begin to act like men in professional settings. They assert the common yet incorrect corollary: If men have the most top roles, they must be doing something right, so maybe women should act like them (Chamorro-Premuzic & Gallop, 2020). In discussion of the saturation of men in leadership roles in the workplace, authors Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic ad Cindy Gallop posit that "the problem is not lack of competent females; it is too few obstacles for incompetent males, which explains the surplus of overconfident, narcissistic, and unethical people in charge" (2020, para.2).

Chamorro-Premuzic and Gallop present several strategies which tend to be demonstrated by women leaders. When employed in the workplace, these methods and ways of leading

contribute to increased effectiveness regardless of gender. First, it is suggested that leaders learn to know their own limitations. Studies show that women, although not as wildly insecure as sometimes portrayed in the media, do tend to be less *over*confident than men. This lack of blind overconfidence allows women (and men) to understand how other people see them and anticipate gaps in their work and relationships with others. This ability of self-reflection gives the individual "the capacity to spot gaps between where they want to be and where they actually are. People who see themselves in a more critical way than others do are better able to prepare, even if it means overpreparing" (Chamorro-Premuzic & Gallop, 2020). This preparedness and acuity in reflection is a known way to increase competence and achievement.

The power of transformational leadership is well-documented in literature, and the aforementioned article also bolsters this argument. "Academic studies show that women are more likely to lead through inspiration, transforming people's attitudes and beliefs, and aligning people with meaning and purpose" (Chamorro-Premuzic & Gallop, 2020). Transformational leadership is strongly linked to higher levels across the board: team performance, productivity, and improving leaders' performance. Inherent to the transformational leadership style is the concept of putting other people ahead of oneself in the workplace. If the leader views the leadership role simply as a higher paycheck or route to prestige, that person will likely be less motivated to help others be the best employee possible.

Even through various barriers, some women are rising through the ranks to managerial positions and beyond, and recent research suggests this can present a positive change for organizations. Parallel studies indicate that people still expect from women's behavior what cultural norms and former relegated roles have yielded for the female gender. During our most recent presidential election, there was much speculation about Kamala Harris-- her background,

her gender, and her qualifications. At the time, it was asserted that she was at a disadvantage because "people are more uncertain about women's than men's abilities to be effective leaders" (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Recent research has focused on agentic versus communal leadership and organizational traits. "Even through the gradual evolution of womens' roles, unfortunately these stereotypes still remain. According to American Psychological Association contributor Alice Eagly, "Worldwide, people expect women to be the more communal sex—warm, supportive, and kind—and men to be the more agentic sex—assertive, dominant, and authoritative" (Eagly, 2020). It is puzzling that although some women do rise to leadership roles in the workplace, these gender stereotypes remain strong. Part of the cultural incongruity between men and women and work is due to the fact that the expectations for women to be the more communal sex has actually risen in the 20th century and the expectation for men as the more agentic sex has remained the same (Eagly, Nater, Miller & Kaufmann, 2019). "While agentic content refers to qualities relevant for goal-attainment, such as assertiveness, competence or persistence, communal content refers to qualities relevant for the establishment and maintenance of social relationships, such as being friendly, helpful, or fair" (Abele, 2014). Women suffer a disadvantage from the start in pursuit of leadership positions as people tend to ascribe historically agentic qualities to their perception of effective leaders, thereby aligning positive leader qualities with stereotypical male attributes (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011).

These ascribed leadership attributes and cultural perceptions were further synthesized in the 1970s and 1980s through cultural research by Virginia Schein and colleagues. Schein surveyed a large group of management students in several countries in her "think manager, think male" experiments to elucidate the relationship between those traits seen as necessary for effective leadership and current sex-role stereotypes. Survey participants were asked to rate 92

characteristics as belonging to "men in general", "women in general", or "successful middle

managers" (Eagly, 2020). A correlation analysis was performed on these results, showing that

"the traits ascribed to managers were more similar to those ascribed to men than women"

(Schein, 1996). According to a review of research from Eagly, recently a meta-analysis of 40

such studies dealing with the aforementioned Scheid paradigm optimistically show that public

perception of quality leadership traits may be starting to embrace more communal traits in

tandem with agentic traits (Eagly, 2020). Even with this slight shift, public expectations for

stereotypically masculine behavior still holds strong for positions of high power and in particular

the offices of the presidency and vice-presidency (Dittmar, 2016).

Researchers Vial, Napier, and Brescoll approach the leadership gender discrepancy from

the standpoint of legitimacy versus illegitimacy in terms of followers' perceptions. Their

hypothesis asserts that women experience a challenge in generating respect and admiration

(components of perceived legitimate leadership) as compared to men. The power position held

by the female then presents as less legitimate than the male powerholder, thereby resulting in

reduced subordinate cooperation and negative subordinate behavior (Vial, Napier, & Brescoll,

2016). Then, as part of a negative feedback loop:

> Subordinate rejection will likely put female leaders in a precarious mindset, and
> trigger negative responses toward subordinates; such behavior can confirm
> negative expectations of female leaders and further undermine female authority in
> a self-reinforcing cycle of illegitimacy. Leader or organizational features that
> enhance status attributions and/or lower subordinates' perceptions of power
> differentials may increase legitimacy for women in leadership roles (Vial et al.,
> 2016, p.1).

It seems that women may be caught in an untenable situation when dealing with subordinates' perceptions when aspiring to and holding leadership positions. The concept of vanguards helps to explain the cloud of illegitimacy which may envelop and constrain females in leadership roles. A vanguard is someone who disconforms to stereotypes within their group or groups (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick & Phelan, 2012). While vanguards may be celebrated by history for their accomplishments (such as Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball) which does indicate society's underlying desire to remove barriers which unfairly limit its members, they are often ridiculed and experience social retribution immediately after the event. "Specifically, vanguards are at risk for backlash, defined as social and economic penalties for behaving counter-stereotypically" (Rudman, 1998). Women acting as vanguards in the realm of leadership, whether in business, education, politics, or other arenas, may experience the vanguard effect which contributes to the aforementioned cycle of illegitimacy. These gender roles are social constructs which are continuously reinforced and refined through the Western patriarchal classification schemes.

Regardless of the benefits of dual-gender leadership, women in the professional realm still experience myriad barriers. According to the Pew Research Center, "Americans widely believe that men have a better shot at leadership positions in business and politics, even as majorities say that men and women make equally good leaders" (2015). If the majority of Americans believe that the capacity for leadership is equal, why does the disparity persist? The issue is complex, multi-faceted, and cultural.

Ethical Implications

The broad understanding of feminist theory and feminist sociology informs this study as well and provides reasoning for policy and institutional changes aimed at ameliorating this pervasive issue. Key areas of this theory focus on the fact that women frequently face discrimination and exclusion based on sex and gender and experience structural and economic inequality (Allen, 2016). In general, "feminist theory is a set of ideas originating with the belief that women are not subordinate to men or only valuable in relationship to men (servant, caretaker, mother, or prostitute), and that the disciplines, systems, and structures in place in our world today may be changed for the better if infused with a feminist point of view. But it is more than this. Feminist theory sets an agenda for action, the aim of which is justice and equality for women everywhere and, of course, also for the men and children to whom they are inextricably linked" (Tong, 2001).

Feminist scholars assert that embracing feminist theory can help uncover neglected voices and perspectives, offering new ways to restructure society around values like inclusivity and care. This assertion provides an argument that further inquiry into and application of feminist theory is a critical prerequisite for making our societies more livable and for overcoming the many crises we face. The pandemic has deepened gender inequalities, especially across racial and class divides, and has emphasized the importance of care in institutions like government and education and the role of the female therein (Mandalaki, van Amsterdam, Prasad & Fotaki, 2022).

The benefits of women in leadership roles are well-documented. Author Amy Novotny summarizes it as follows: "Decades of studies show women leaders help increase productivity, enhance collaboration, inspire organizational dedication, and improve fairness" (2023, para.1).

As described in a meta-analysis by Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky, women leaders show a greater tendency to inspire others within an organization to work towards the mission (1992).

Collective group intelligence appears to be enhanced proportionally to the percentage of women involved in group cognitive tasks. Researcher Anita Williams Wooley and colleagues have isolated a single statistical factor emerging from correlations across the performance of individuals during the performance of various cognitive tasks. In two studies involving 699 participants, Wooley and her team revealed strong evidence for a general factor of collective intelligence influencing group performance across tasks. Interestingly, this factor is not linked to the highest intelligence factor of any individual in the group, but strongly linked to conversational turn-taking and the percentage of women involved (Wooley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, and Malone, 2010). Inclusion of greater numbers of women, then, appears to have the potential to enhance overall performance within an organization.

A study led by social psychologist Mansi P. Joshi, PhD, found that simply the presence of a female leader as compared to a male leader produced a tendency for people to expect more fair treatment within the organization, as well as higher anticipated salary and positional status. Female leaders signaled greater organizational trust across both male- and female-dominated industries, regardless of their position and at various tiers within the organizational hierarchy (Joshi & Diekman, 2021). An additional benefit of women in leadership positions is the mitigation of institutional stereotypes often expressed through language. A recent study utilized natural language processing techniques in an analysis of over 43,000 investor calls and shareholder documents from 33 S & P 500 organizations displaying both male and female leadership. Analyses reveal an association between the presence of female CEOs and board members and positive changes in the language used in the organization through association of

women with critical leadership characteristics necessary for success. Findings point to female leaders as a means to change gender-based stereotyping in the workplace and to overcome the dichotomous characterizations of women as either competent or likable (Lawson, Martin, Huda, & Matz, 2022).

Policy Recommendations

With this degree of systemic bias faced by women in educational leadership positions, it is clear that institutional changes must take place in order to provide females with executive aspirations an equal opportunity to pursue these offices. Thomas Glass, in his literature review published in The School Administrator and previously discussed in this writing, cites the common fallacies of why women do not achieve the superintendency, as well as some strategies to help alleviate the problem. His overarching point is for school boards to undertake efforts to reform and change the nature of the superintendency (2000). Glass refers to a decade-long study performed by AASA, The School Superintendents Association, revealing that teachers' unions are generally averse to hiring additional central office administration as they tend to globally feel these monies could be better used to bolster teachers' salaries when in fact additional administrative positions redistribute duties from the top office and have a substantial effect on the efficiency of the entire organization (Glass, 2000). Restructuring the nature of the executive office will undoubtedly help to draw in those females who are reluctant to make the necessary time commitments. In contrast to the potential for critics of this tactic to worry about budget implications,

> A cadre of well-trained central-office administrators not only would help change the workload for the superintendent but also provide a well from which to draw

future superintendents. It is very likely that more women would be attracted to the superintendency if the oppressive workload was altered (Glass, 2000).

A 2019 dissertation study performed by Felicia Moschella supports this argument wherein a primary conclusion was that there is not an insignificant number of central office administrators who are positioned for the superintendency but choose not to do so. Time and family constraints were implicated in this research as well (Moschella, 2019). The RAND Corporation, a research organization, supports this theory and a recent report indicates that boards should show commitment to a strong leadership team at the central office level:

> More-distributed leadership could make the superintendent position more attractive insofar as it could reduce the high levels of job-related stress and long work hours. In addition, more manageable hours could make the position more tenable for women, who have historically balanced more family responsibilities than their male counterparts and remain underrepresented in the position generally (Zalaznick, 2022).

The deliberate restructuring of the scope of the superintendency dovetails with the concept of career positioning as discussed earlier in this paper. It is well-understood that the trajectory of a female's career within educational leadership has great implications for her ability to obtain the corner office. AASA recommends to boards, in an effort to recruit and make the top job more desirable for women, to rethink job responsibilities and create more opportunities for the day-to-day fiscal management to fall to an assistant superintendent thereby create more time in the workweek for superintendents to have a direct hand in the instructional processes of the school district. Recall that the curriculum director position is not frequently considered a direct route to the superintendency. Recent statistics tell us that a whopping 71.3% of

curriculum directors are women (Zippia, 2022). This is a massive cohort of women central office administrators who are unlikely to achieve the top spot due to their career path, which may or may not have been of their choosing. Redefining the responsibilities will allow for a more hands-on approach from superintendents in the C & I realm and work to a greater extent in the nuances of the field which provide them the highest degree of satisfaction. Additionally, it has been shown that direct involvement and goal-setting in the area of instruction has definite payoffs in student achievement:

> Effective superintendents ensure that the collaborative goal-setting process results in nonnegotiable goals (i.e., goals that all staff members must act upon) in at least two areas: student achievement and classroom instruction. Effective superintendents set specific achievement targets for schools and students and then ensure the consistent use of research-based instructional strategies in all classrooms to reach those targets (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

AASA interviews reveal both men and women central office administrators agree that more emphasis on curriculum and instruction will yield benefits across leadership levels. "Specifically, both groups identified emphasis on improving instruction and knowledge of the instructional process and curriculum as significant factors for women's advancement." (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

Not unique to the superintendency is the paradox that many professionals may aspire for years to obtain a certain career or promotion, then discover that the position is not as expected. Research suggests that superintendent preparation programs should consider yearlong internships where pre-service administrators are able to experience the job firsthand. AASA suggests a model of state-funded internships resulting in an employment pipeline, a win-win situation for

women searching for a position and districts searching for leaders. "State-funded yearlong superintendency internships would allow many women administrators to gain a close view of the position. In the AASA study, both men and women superintendents said they gained a great deal of personal satisfaction from their jobs" (Glass, 2000).

Positioning aspiring female superintendents in such internship opportunities may have an ancillary effect of creating valuable mentorship situations as these women progress through their careers. Female leaders in general report a dearth of mentorship access. A clear organizational barrier for many women aspiring to leadership is the lack of mentors and individuals who resemble them demographically and socially which the future leaders are able to emulate. Dean Elmuti and colleagues note that it is not uncommon for leaders in the pipeline to gravitate towards mentors of the same gender. Women tend to understand the challenges frequently specific to women, and men to men. This comfort level and social connection is sought out by employees. "Men do not face the same barriers, have the same family issues, and many times simply do not want to mentor a woman" (Elmuti et al., 2009). Women's mentorship needs differ as well; many women profess to desire more encouragement and more tasks to complete. Men, on the other hand, report being resistant to mentoring a woman because of societal perceptions that women are overly-emotional or they are concerned about the risk of being accused of sexual harassment (Hansen, 2008). Additionally, women occupying executive positions report that the "lack of mentors has been detrimental to their climb up the corporate ladder. Because men generally occupy the highest positions of leadership, men are more likely to be in positions to open doors" (Jakobsh, 2012).

A 2016 study performed by Amy Beth Denneson further underscores the critical nature of successful female-female mentoring relationships between women aspiring to the

superintendency. The subjects of this research project were female superintendents in the state

of Minnesota, all of whom reported having a mentorship relationship in their first or second

superintendent positions. Of these respondents, almost 40% indicated that they had selected

their own mentor, and about 25% had a mentor assigned to them through some professional

organization. The least likely manner of acquiring a mentor for this group was through their

district of employment (Denneson, 2016). The vast majority of these mentorship were of an

informal nature and developed organically through interactions with the individuals. School

board relations and functions and personnel issues emerged across the group as the most

pervasive topic of tutelage. In general, the relationships were positive and impactful. Margaret

Grogan cautions emerging female superintendents on the potential loneliness and high publicity

of the position and the integral nature of being able to share experiences with mentors:

> Many women identified mentoring and support systems as crucial to their
>
> success. One woman shared, "It sure is a visible job — definitely the eye of the
>
> hurricane on many days. We need more support as we start out in the field instead
>
> of trial by fire, especially women" (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

As a culminating suggestion to rapidly level the gender gap in educational administration,

Glass makes a suggestion of financial incentives for districts who hire women superintendents.

When all else fails, the almighty dollar may prevail. "Districts and search firms should be

rewarded by states for hiring women or minority superintendents. Financial incentives might be

given by states to school districts that hire women or minority superintendents. One possibility: a

grant equal to the first-year salary" (Glass, 2000).

Sometimes, the explanation for discrepancy across gender or other defining

characteristics comes down to basic internal biases. As we still see disparate numbers of males,

specifically male former-high school principals and athletic directors, rising through the ranks to the district's top spot, the tendency to hire a mirror of oneself permeates the hiring process. For this reason professional organizations such as AASA have begun to promote women's leadership conferences and workshops geared toward female educational leaders looking to network. AASA conducts their Aspiring Superintendents Academy for Female Leaders where women are able to get acquainted with like-minded school leaders and share ideas and establish relationships.

Steps to addressing the gender discrepancy in the superintendency may be extracted from efforts aimed at unifying the executive gender ratio in other professional sectors. Authors Ammerman and Groysberg from the Harvard Business Review "recently surveyed more than 150 female executives in a wide range of businesses around the globe and found strong agreement that gender bias and structural disadvantages are still impeding women's success and warping people management at all stages, from recruitment through employee retention" (2021). They assert that by now companies are obligated to look into the systemic barriers which exist in their organizations to prevent women from succeeding. When examining entry-level positions, the male-female balance is somewhat equal, yet as we walk the steps of the advancement pyramid the percentage gap begins to widen. "The more senior the group, the fewer women there are" (Ammerman & Groysberg, 2021).

Companies must begin to systematically pay attention to addressing inequities in the seven main areas of talent management: attracting candidates, hiring, integration, development, assessing performance, managing compensation and promotion, and retention of effective performers. It is especially important to begin and take deliberate steps to work on the attraction of candidates. Here is where much of the discrimination begins, as candidates are frequently

drawn to others like them (a process known as *homophily*) and those others are likely to be white and male. Managers may also approach male and female resumes with different standards (Ammerman & Groysberg, 2021). It is also noted that, in addition to closely monitoring and assessing their female workforce, companies should measure diversity and inclusivity efforts organization-wide.

We know that "social science and biological literature suggests that females and males, on average, differ in why and how they compete for access to political leadership in mixed-gender groups" (Smith, von Reuden, van Vugt, Fichtel, & Kappeler, 2021, p.1). We also know, from the aforementioned review of literature, that females demonstrate desirable leadership characteristics aligned with efficacious results. So while the patriarchal design of our society with its embedded androcentric leanings results in females starting several steps behind males from the beginning of their career path,

Although we have seen marginal gains as of late, there is still much work to be done in the area of equality with respect to women occupying the corner office in many school districts. True gender parity will occur when the percentages of women versus men in the classroom remains commensurate throughout the ranks of educational leadership, from principal to assistant superintendent to superintendent. All leaders must be hired and evaluated based on merit and ability, not gender.

Summary

Public education began to take form in the United States in the 1600s. While women have historically been and continue to be in the classroom, their numbers in the highest offices of leadership in public schools are not commensurate with their numbers overall in the profession.

Women continue to earn about two-thirds of the leadership degrees in education, pointing to the fact that there is no shortage on the part of women of talent or willingness to earn credentials which would prepare them for the offices of superintendent. Recent data shows women occupying only 28% of the superintendencies during the 2022-2023 school year, and of those that do hold the office, 94% of them earn an average of $2100 less than their male counterparts.

The ability to move into the principalship appears to be a key factor in the ability of any individual woman to attain a superintendent position. The secondary principalship is a key position in the district, as with this position comes a process of compounded influence which increases the administrator's access to those in higher positions and positions of power, thereby allowing for an elevated authority over more key aspects of the district. Schein's conceptualization of career mobility may be used to illustrate this concept as those in the secondary principalship experience circumferential, vertical, and radial movements placing them in a prime position of access to the office of superintendent. Visibility of secondary principals at various evening and extracurricular events also elevate access and influence at the district level. Women continue to lag behind men in placement in secondary principalship positions.

The phenomenon of "the glass ceiling" as described by Marilyn Loden appears to play a part in constructing barriers for women in higher offices of public education, pointing to ingrained cultural barriers and biases toward women in leadership positions. These barriers may be attitudinal or organizational, or both. Women may have to try harder to be perceived as competent, creating a constant battle in the workplace. This struggle is also compared to a labyrinth, as even when some women reach the office of the superintendent, the walls still remain in place for the women to attempt to follow.

Work and family obligations are another factor impacting the ability of females to reach the top office in education. Both explicit and implicit biases may be at work against women trying to obtain high-level positions, and women are more likely to be asked in subtle or overt ways about obligations in the home. Women continue to experience the expectation that their families' needs should be placed ahead of their own. Evidence of this pervasive issue exists in other areas of management and leadership also.

Male hegemony contributes to this unequal representation as well since men occupy the office in a far greater percentage than women and frequently function in the screening or selection process for central office positions. Institutionalized patriarchal structure and gender-based harassment also contribute to the accessibility of the superintendency for many women. Evidence of overt gender bias continues to surface in varied areas. The general acceptance of society for male supremacy allows such discrimination and harassment to persist. Microaggressions may also be present for women in the workplace which over time build to cause discouragement and a perception of unfair treatment.

The gatekeeper theory aims to assist in explanation for the unequal representation. When a new superintendent is being selected, the school boards and superintendent search firms are the "gatekeepers" to the process. Their internal biases may contribute to the perpetuation of the male-domination in leadership in the field of education as most school board members and retired superintendents are white men and they are the parties serving to select the candidates. Additionally, the leadership styles typically embodied by women are indicative of promoting organizational success, yet men are frequently viewed as possessing the traits of a quality leader.

One may more fully understand the phenomenon of unequal representation in leadership positions in public education through the lens of feminist theory and sociology. This arm of

39

philosophical thought aims to uncover voices and perspectives which may be stifled in an effort to make our societies better for all and more equipped to overcome crises. Ethical implications of this gender disparity in the superintendency are also informed by the promising research into collective group intelligence, revealing that group performance task effectiveness is enhanced by inclusion of greater numbers of women. Also, myriad studies indicate that having women in leadership roles produces added benefits of increased productivity, fairness, and dedication to the organization. Females in high positions of leadership may also act as a means to dispel gender-based stereotypes in the workplace.

Changes must take place to ameliorate this disparity in the educational realm, specifically to reform and change the nature of the superintendency and the hiring process. Efforts may begin by restructuring and rethinking the sometimes oppressive workload of many superintendents through employment of additional and varied central office administrative staff. This suggestion is bolstered by the fact that a recent study indicates a significant number of educators poised to enter the central office administration who choose not to do it, citing long hours and a lack of distributive leadership.

Superintendent preparation programs should consider yearlong internships where prospective superintendents are able to experience the job in a more authentic way prior to officially obtaining a position. This could be accomplished through state-funded internships which would allow women to gain a closer view of the actual position. This would produce the added benefit of allowing pre-service female superintendents access to a valuable mentoring relationship, another recommended policy action to produce and retain women in the office. Female-female mentorship opportunities are ideal, as men do not experience the same career progression or barriers that women experience.

An additional policy remedy is to implement financial incentives for districts who choose to hire female superintendents. One suggestion is to offer a grant to the hiring district equivalent to the first-year salary of the female candidate. Increasing access to women's leadership conferences and professional development workshops would increase networking opportunities for females looking to advance into leadership positions and get acquainted with other females in upper leadership positions. From a recruitment perspective, school districts must take steps to attract female candidates and ensure internal biases do not negatively impact the screening, interviewing, and hiring practices with respect to access to the office of the superintendency.

References

Abele, A. (2014). Pursuit of communal values in an agentic manner: A way to happiness? *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.01320.

Allen K. R. (2016). Feminist theory in family studies: History, biography, and critique. *Journal Of Family Theory & Review*, 8(2), 207–224.

Ammerman, C. & Groysberg, B. (2021). How to close the gender gap. *Harvard Business Review*. May-June 2021.

Bernal, C. (1994). *Examining gender inequity in the superintendency: The gatekeeper perspective.* [Doctoral dissertation, California State University Fresno].

Bilal, A., Ahmad, W., Muhammad, J., & Ragif, H. (2021). How women's transformational leadership induces employees' innovative behavior through trust and connectivity: A sequential mediation model. *International Management Institute*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150920982760.

Blount, J. M. (1998). *Destined to rule the schools: Women and the superintendency*, 1873-1995. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

Brunner, C.C. & Grogan, M. (2007). *Women leading school systems*. Lanham, MD: American Association of School Administrators.

Bureau of Labor and Statistics [BLS] (2024, March 12). Women's earnings were 83.6 percent of men's in 2023. https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/womens- earnings-were-83-6-Percent-of-mens-in-2023.

Chamorro-Premuzic, T. & Gallop, C. (2020). 7 leadership lessons men can learn from women. *Harvard Business Review*. April 01, 2020. https://hbr.org/2020/04/7-leadership-lessons-men-can-learn-from-women.

Chen, G. (2021). A relevant history of public education in the United States. *Public School Review*. publicschoolreview.com.

Chughtai A., Byrne M., Flood B. (2015). Linking ethical leadership to employee well-being: The role of trust in the supervisor. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 128, 653-663.

Center on Education Policy [CEP]. (2020). *History and evolution of public education in the United States*. Graduate School of Education and Human Development, George Washington University.

Crockett, E. (2015). This sexist job posting asks women to apply because they'll be filling in as a receptionist. Vox. https://www.vox.com/2015/11/23/9786342/ Sexist-job-posting-receptionist.

Denneson, A. (2016). *The impact of mentorship on women superintendents in Minnesota.* St. Cloud State University, dissertation [2016].

Dittmar, K. (2016). Watching the 2016 election with a gender lens. *PS: Political Science & Politics*. October 2016. 49(4). 807-812.

Eagly, A. H., Makhijani, M. G., & Klonsky, B. G. (1992). Gender and the evaluation of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin,* 111(1), 3–22.

Eagly, A. & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109, 573-598.

Eagly, A., Nater, C., Miller, D., Kaufmann, M. (2019). Gender stereotypes have changed: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of U.S. public opinion polls from 1946 to 2018. *American Psychologist*, 75, 301-315.

Eagly, A. (2020). Once more: The rise of female leaders. *American Psychological Association Research Brief*. https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/female-leaders.

Elmuti, D., Jia, H., & Davis, H.,.(2009). Challenges women face in leadership positions and

    organizational effectiveness. *Journal of Leadership Education,* 8(2), 167-187.

Ely, R. & Padavic, I. (2020). What's really holding women back? It's not what most people

    think. *Harvard Business Review,* 98(2), 58-67.

Gillespie, N. & Mann, L. (2004). Transformational leadership and shared values: The building

    blocks of trust. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 19, 588-607.

Glass, T.E. (2000). Where are all the women superintendents? *The School Administrator,*

    57(6), 28-32.

Glass, T.E. & Franceschini, L.A. (2007). *The state of the American Superintendency: A*

    mini-decade study. Lanhan, MD: American Association of School Administrators.

Goldin, C. (1999). *A brief history of education in the United States.* National Bureau of

    Economic Research, Cambridge, MA. Available through Harvard Digital Access at

    https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/42662008/h0119.pdf?sequence=2.

Grogan, M. (1996). *Voices of women aspiring to the superintendency*. Albany, New York: State

    University of New York Press.

Grogan, M., and Brunner, C. C. (2005). Women leading systems: latest facts and

    figures on women and the superintendency. *School Administrator*, 62, 46–50.

Hakim, C. (2003). Competing family models, competing social policies. *Family Matters*,

    No. 64, Autumn 2003.

Hansen, K. (2008). The value of a mentor. QuintCareers.com, November 13. Retrieved

    October 15, 2021 from http://www.quintcareers.com/mentor_value.html.

Ho, P. & Hallman, I. (2016). Barriers & bias: The status of women in leadership. AAUW

    Online Report. https://www.aauw.org/resources/research/barrier-bias/.

Jakobsh, D. (2012). Barriers to women's leadership. *Encyclopedia of Leadership.* Jan

    2012, 77-81.

Joshi, M. P., & Diekman, A. B. (2022). My fair lady? Inferring organizational trust from the

    mere presence of women in leadership roles. *Personality and Social Psychology*

    Bulletin, 48(8), 1220-1237.

Judge, W. & Douglas, T. (2009). Organizational change capacity: The systematic development

    of a scale. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 22, 635-649.

Kim, Y. & Brunner, C.C. (2009). School administrators' career mobility to the superintendency:

    Gender differences in career development. *Journal of Educational Administration*,

    47, 75-107.

King v. Acosta. (2012). 678 F.3d 470. 7th Cir., http://www.casetext.com.

Koenig, A. M., Eagly, A. H., Mitchell, A. A., & Ristikari, T. (2011). Are leader stereotypes

    masculine? A meta-analysis of three research paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin,*

    137(4), 616–642.

Kotter, J. (1995). Leading change: Why transformation efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*,

    73(2), 59-67.

Kowalski, T.J., McCord, R.S., Peterson, G.J., Young, I.P., & Ellerson, N.M. (2011). *The*

    American school superintendent: 2010 decennial study. Lanham, MD: Rowman &

    Littlefield Publishers.

Lawson, M. A., Martin, A. E., Huda, I., & Matz, S. C. (2022). Hiring women into senior

    leadership positions is associated with a reduction in gender stereotypes

    in organizational language. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of*

    the United States of America, 119(9), 1-11.

Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics. II. Channels of group life, social planning, and

    action research. *Human Relations, 1,* 143-153.

Lisa, A. (2020). History of the American education system. Stacker blog. Accessed

    November 10, 2022 at https://stacker.com/stories/5541/history-american-

    Education-system.

Loden, M. (2017). 100 women: Why I invented the glass ceiling phrase. *BBC News*, December

    13, 2017.

Long, L. & Mao, M. (2008). *Impact of leadership style on organizational change: An empirical*

    study in China. Paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Wireless

    Communications, Networking, and Mobile Computing, IEEE Conference Publications.

Lutz Allen, S., Smith, J.E., & DaSilva, N. (2013). Leadership style in relation to organizational

    Change and organizational creativity: Perceptions from nonprofit organizational

    members. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 24, 23-42.

MacKinnon, K. (2020). The women are taking over: Exploring hegemonic masculinities in

    elementary principalship. *Management in Education*, 35(1).

Mandalaki E., van Amsterdam N., Prasad A., Fotaki M. (2022). Caring about the

    unequal effects of the pandemic: What feminist theory, art, and activism can teach us.

    Gender, Work & Organization, 29, 1224–1235.

Maranto, R., *et. al*., (2018). Boys will be superintendents: School leadership as a gendered

    Profession. *Kappan*, 100(2). 12-16.

Moschella, F. (2019). *Perceptions of central office administrators who chose not to apply for the*

    position of superintendent. Lesley University, dissertation [2019].

National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). Characteristics of of public and private

elementary school principals in the United States. Retrieved from

https://nces.ed.gov/.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2021). Characteristics of Public School Principals.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cls/public-school-principals.

Northouse, P. (2007). *Leadership: Theories and practices.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Novotney, A. (2024, July 8). *Women leaders make work better. Here's the science behind how to promote them.* American Psychological Association Research Brief.

https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/female-leaders-make-work-better.

Ortiz, F.I. (1982). *Career patterns in education: Women, men, and minorities in public school administration.* Boston, MA: Bergin Publishers.

Paterson, W. (2022). From 1871 to 2021: A brief history of education in the United States.

Buffalo State University, https://suny.buffalostate.edu/news/1871-2021-short-history

Pennsylvania Department of Education [PDE]. (2024). *Superintendent PK-12 Letter Requirements*. education.pa.gov.

Rudman, L. A. (1998). Self-promotion as a risk factor for women: The costs and benefits of counterstereotypical impression management. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 74(3), 629-645.

Rudman, L., Moss-Racusin, C. A., Glick, P. & Phelan, J. E. (2012). Reactions to vanguards: Advances in backlash theory. *Advances in Experimental Psychology*, 45, 167-227.

Sawchuck, S. (2022). Why aren't there more women superintendents? *Education Week Online*, March 10, 2022.

Schein, E.H. (1971). The individual, the organization, and the career: A conceptual scheme. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 7, 401-426.

Schein, V. (1996). Think manager- think male: A global phenomenon? *Journal of*

    Organizational Behavior, Jan 1996, 33-41.

Shakeshaft, C. (1989). *Women in educational administration* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA:

    Corwin Press.

Sharp, W.L., *et. al*. (2004). Women superintendents: Why so few? *Educational Research*

    Quarterly, 27(3), 22-37.

Smith, J., von Reuden, C., van Vugt, M., Fichtel, C., Kappeler, P. (2021). An evolutionary

    explanation for the female leadership paradox. *Frontiers in Ecology & Evolution,*

    9, 1-20.

Soparnot, R. (2011). The concept of organizational change capacity. *Journal of Organizational*

    Change Management, 24, 640-661.

Tallerico, M. (2000). Gaining access to the superintendency: Headhunting, gender, and color.

    Educational Administration Quarterly, 36(1), 18-43.

Tarbutton, T. (2019). The leadership gap in education. *School Administration, Multicultural*

    Education, & Inclusion, Fall 2019.

Tong, R. (2010). Feminist theory. International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral

    Sciences, 2001, 5484-5491.

United States Department of Labor [US DOL], (1991). *The glass ceiling initiative: A report.*

    The Glass Ceiling Commission. Washington, DC.

United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, (2016). *EEOC releases fiscal*

    year 2015 enforcement and litigation data. Washington, DC.

Vial, A., Napier, J. & Brescoll, V. (2016). A bed of thorns: Female leaders and the

    self-reinforcing cycle of illegitimacy. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27(3), 400-414.

Waters, T. & Marzano, R. (2006). School district leadership that works: The effect of

    superintendent leadership on student achievement. *Mid-Continent Research for*

    Education and Learning. September 2006.

White, N. (2016). *Work-family balance: A narrative analysis of the personal and professional*

    histories of female superintendents. [Doctoral dissertation, Marquette University].

Williams, J. (2015). Hitting the maternal wall. *Academe*. November 2004.

    DOI: 10.2307/40252700.

Wooley, A.W., Chabris, C., Pentland, A., Hashmi, N., & Malone, T. (2010). Evidence for a

    collective intelligence factor in the performance of human groups. *Science*, 330(6004),

    686-688.

Muhammad, Y., Rabia, I., Muhammad, K., Noor, A., & Muhammad, M. (2016). Leadership

    styles in relation to employees' trust and organizational change capacity: Evidence from

    non-profit organizations. *SAGE Open*, Oct-Dec 2016. https://www.researchgate.net/

    publication/310658352.

Yasir, M., Rabia, I., Muhammad, K., Noor, A., and Muhammad, M. (2016). Leadership styles in

    elation to employees' trust. *SAGE Open*. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full

    /10.1177/2158244016675396.

Zalaznick, M. (2022). Are superintendents still happy at work as the pressures keep piling up?

    District Administration, July 2022.

Zippia. (2022). High school principal demographics and statistics in the US. Retrieved from

    https://www.zippia.com/high-school-principal-jobs/demographics/.