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EXPERIENCED KENTUCKY FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By
Karen Thomas McNay

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Professor of Educational Leadership Studies

Lexington, Kentucky

2016

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

EXPERIENCED KENTUCKY FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Women historically hit a glass ceiling when trying to reach for a school district's highest position. While nationally an overwhelming majority of educators are female, approximately only a quarter of all superintendents are women. In Kentucky, 19% of public school superintendents are female. Female superintendent research has focused on the barriers that inhibit women from obtaining the superintendency; however, recently a shift to focus on how women lead has occurred.

The superintendency encompasses five roles: instructional leader, manager, political leader, communicator and applied social scientist. Although female superintendents' strength is often instructional leadership, the role of political leader is met with some difficulty. This exploratory study examines experienced Kentucky female superintendents' perceptions and practices of political leadership. The research was conducted in two phases: Phase 1 invited all Kentucky female superintendents to participate in demographic questionnaire, and Phase 2 encompassed two one-hour interviews with six experienced Kentucky superintendents.

Four main areas provide the foundation for inquiry: preservice experiences, defining political leadership, behaviors of political leadership, and levels of political leadership. Kentucky female superintendents stated political leadership was the role they were least prepared for in the infancy of their superintendency. Female superintendents' lived-experiences differed from the norm of political leadership.

Female district leaders outlined a cyclical, proactive process of political leadership dependent on relationships—networking. Women superintendents capitalized on referent power to develop a “political lens” when making decisions. Study participants reported two distinct levels of political leadership (local and state), and they connected their district's vision to resources—people—and served as a bridge to connect outside resources into the district. This work affirms previous research concerning female superintendents but also brings to light how women perceive politics, which is outside some of the previous norms and research concerning political leadership.

KEYWORDS: Women superintendent, female superintendent,
political leadership, superintendency, political process.

Karen Thomas McNay

Student Signature

April 5, 2016

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EXPERIENCED KENTUCKY FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF
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DEDICATION PAGE

To all the women who serve as educational leaders who work each day to improve the education for our children.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The composition of the P12 educational workforce in the United States continues to be a strong female majority. Over the last century, while a majority of females served in P12 classrooms as teacher, most administrative positions in districts remained held by men, leaving females underrepresented in leadership especially in the top leadership position—superintendency. When discussing female leadership, researchers and journalists often referred to a *glass ceiling*, an invisible barrier women often ascend to but cannot break through to obtain the top position in organizations (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Oakley, 2000). The limited female leadership in the superintendency differed from other CEO positions as the superintendent position became known as the most male-dominated profession in the United States (Björk & Keedy, 2001). During the last ten years, the glass ceiling has been cracked as more females move into top leadership positions; however, it is difficult to find a common path followed to achieve the position. The labyrinth of paths continues to slow the progression of female leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Quast, 2011). Women encounter barriers within this labyrinth that require professional connections and a political acuity before they assume the superintendency as well as through the years they hold that position.

Significance of Study

During the 2011-12 school year, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that 76.6% of the teachers in the United States were female (NCES, 2013). While women supply the workforce in education, the hierarchal structure of

school-district administrative positions, remain male dominant. At the highest position in the district hierarchal pyramid, one will find only 24.1% of superintendents were women according to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Decennial 2010 Survey (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). While the number of female superintendents has increased over the years, women continue to be underrepresented compared to the total national population as well as the superintendent populations. Within P12 education, there is a predominance of female educators—but very few female superintendents. At the rate of increase evidenced through analysis of multiple AASA decennial surveys, it will take approximately 75 years for women to be proportionally represented in the superintendency (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Of the females employed in central office administrative positions such as assistant or associate superintendents, 40% indicated aspirations to become a superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Brunner & Kim, 2010).

Because women face unique issues and barriers as they seek to attain the district's highest administrative position, those who aspire to the position feel hindered or discouraged and thus choose not to seek the position. The various difficulties of obtaining and then retaining the position create barriers, which continue to be examined through numerous researchers' efforts to explain the phenomena. As research on women's leadership moves beyond the study of barriers to women obtaining the superintendency, research findings can provide greater understanding about how women lead and can potentially increase the number of female educational leaders (Brown & Irby, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

In the AASA 2010 survey of United States superintendents, 90.6% of respondents felt their school board placed emphasis on the role of political leader (Kowalski et al., 2011). When split by gender, female respondents were slightly less likely to view the role of political leadership as a role the school board placed substantial emphasis upon. In Brunner and Grogan's (2007) study of assistant and associate superintendents, female administrators identified politics as one of three main barriers to the superintendency. Approximately 29% of women in their study responded that the perception of school boards is one that women are not politically astute. Skla, Scott and Benestante (2001) examined gender, power and politics within the superintendency and reported that women's own awareness of the intersection of the three concepts became a pivotal role in their success. Female superintendents often experienced a critical incident that led them to a new understanding about gender in relationship to power and politics.

Men and women view politics and power differently (Björk, 2000; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). Because the role of superintendent is defined by male norms due to the overwhelming number of men who hold the position, women's different perception of political leadership, which informs their professional practice, can create challenges for them. With political leadership an area of emphasis by school boards, expectations held by male-dominated boards differ from those of female superintendents. With instructional leadership the main focus of female superintendents (Kowalski et al., 2011), their serving as an effective political leader provides the support for educational initiatives.

Following a masculine role model for leadership is not the way women want to lead (Brunner, 2000a; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The study of female

superintendents' role as a political leader differentiates from literature on leadership styles because political leadership is defined in the context of masculine traits, strategies and accepted practices (Brunner, 2000a; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007; Skla et al., 2001; Tallerico, 1999). Understanding the commonalities among female practices opens the door to establish genderless practices for effective political leadership by all superintendents. For aspiring women, the opportunity to gain knowledge, participate in networks, and develop skills before entering the superintendency offers greater chance of their successful tenure as district leaders.

Many studies about women superintendents at the turn of the 21st century focused on those who served in the first wave of female district leaders. Research has, however, decreased concerning women superintendency since 2000 (Lemasters & Roach, 2012). Previous research professed barriers and limits to women moving into the position. For example, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) called for further research about how women lead as superintendents and Watson and Grogan (2005) state power relations in educational leadership often go under researched.

Interest remains about how the second wave of female school leaders view political leadership because the number of female superintendents have nearly doubled nationally. In Kentucky, 19% of superintendents are female, which is below the national statistic (Kentucky Department of Education [KDE], 2014d). This research seeks to build on the previous research concerning women superintendents and their leadership. In particular, a greater understanding of how female superintendents serve as political leaders can benefit both current women superintendents and aspiring superintendents.

Statement of Problem

Political leadership conjures up many ideas ranging from politicians serving in office to politics inside the work place. Schools within the P12 public education system are often thought of as apolitical places because they are funded through local taxes and because districts restrict employees' political advocacy and engagement. However, school boards expect political leadership by their superintendents when resources diminish, communities become more pluralistic, and school officials are held more accountable. Politics, especially positional power, is difficult to discuss because role socialization for female power hinges on relationships *with* others (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gilligan, 1993) rather than politics and power often related to domination and control as often practiced by men. As women move through the labyrinth for leadership positions to obtain the superintendency, understanding both male and female political norms in addition to differences in use of power becomes critical to their leadership. Previous research shows differences in male and female political leadership and power relations (Brunner, 2000a; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Stanford, Oates, & Flores, 1995). With more women becoming superintendents, it is important to understand how they perceive political leadership, which requires influencing others, developing relationships, and working with a variety of groups. Further, how women superintendents enact political leadership with their school boards (Brunner C., 2000a), which is different from their male colleagues, needs to be revealed.

Purpose of Study

This study focuses on the practice of the political leadership among experienced Kentucky female superintendents. In addition, it seeks to increase understanding about

how females network, perceive power, and influence others. Social relations established by women and the networking necessary to establish those relationships, the knowledge necessary to navigate conflict, and the ways they address diverse community needs adds understanding to the field of women's superintendency research. Identifying common factors through research provides important information to aid aspiring female superintendents through preparation or mentorships. Increased knowledge about female leadership in education can promote more equity and diversity in school systems. Since women often avoid discussion of power and politics due to gender constraints, this research bridges a gap in research between political leadership practices and current perceptions of power, and it potentially provides greater understanding about how successful female superintendents enact their role as a political leader.

Research Questions

This research focused on developing a picture of experienced Kentucky female superintendents' political leadership role. Thus, the overarching question for this study was, *How do experienced female superintendents perceive political leadership?* Two sub-questions sought to answer the overarching question:

1. *How do female superintendents foster relationships and use power to influence others?*
2. *What behaviors do female superintendents engage in or implement as political leaders?*

Data were gathered through an initial online questionnaire followed by two one-hour interviews with individual female superintendents. The questionnaire sought demographic information from all Kentucky public school female superintendents and

volunteers to participate in the next phase of the study. Questionnaire data determined participants for two face-to-face, one-hour interviews with six experienced Kentucky female superintendents. The above sub-questions were divided into two interviews. The first interview sought understanding of each participant's (a) perceptions of power and (b) how she uses power and influence as a leader. The second interview sought (a) perceptions about political leadership and (b) how female superintendents act as political leaders.

Four experienced Kentucky female superintendents volunteered by responding to the online survey. Four additional experienced Kentucky female superintendents were invited to participate based their service center district and years of experience as superintendent; two superintendents accepted the invitation to participate in the research. Each participant represented a different service center region in Kentucky. Because no females representing minority populations currently served as superintendents in Kentucky, this research included only females who are White, non-Hispanic. These conditions met the requirements for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) which seeks a homogenous sample for study.

Five superintendents participated in two separate, semi-structured phone interviews at a time convenient to the participant. One participant completed one one-hour phone interview and one one-hour face-to-face interview upon her request. Each session was audiotaped and transcribed for further analysis using IPA. The researcher reviewed and analyzed each interview transcript before conducting the next interview. Questions for the second interview protocol were revised after examination of findings

from the first interview by rearranging questions to begin the interview about political leadership.

Methodology

This qualitative study sought greater understanding about how experienced Kentucky female superintendents perceive and enact political leadership. The IPA method collected data about each participant's lived-experiences followed by the interpretation of those experiences by the researcher. IPA methodology seeks to understand lived-experiences without preconceived theories, conceptions or notions (Smith et al., 2009).

Through a repeated hermeneutics cycle, the researcher broke apart the transcript into meaningful parts in words, phrases, or sentences, thus chunking the transcript into parts. The researcher then analyzed the data (i.e., interpretive part of the cycle) by seeking common themes and then comparing data gathered through the previous cycle to identify meaningful words, phrases and sentences. After analyzing responses by each interviewee, the described hermeneutic cycle took the transcription of participants' words through the IPA process of descriptive text broken into meaningful pieces and reviewed through the researcher's interpretative lens for themes. Once the researcher completed the process from each of the six first interview transcripts, the second interview protocol was altered to seek greater understanding about participants' comments during the first session. Once transcriptions of both interviews were transcribed and checked by interviewees, the researcher completed each participant's narrative and conducted a cross-case analysis.

Definition of Political Leadership

For the purposes of this study, the political leadership role in public school districts was defined as the leader who (a) determines the allocations of resources, (b) sets a vision for the district, (c) seeks input from individuals and groups in the decision-making process, and (d) navigates conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Political leadership requires listening, communicating, bargaining, negotiating, and using power to navigate conflict and develop coalitions. Because the superintendent who uses the political-leadership role acts as a change agent, political leadership is a process. For women, decision-making includes a sense of “ethic of care” (Gilligan, 2011, p. 17) and justice (Boals, 1975) when acting as a political leader.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This study of experienced Kentucky female superintendents’ perceptions and practices of political leadership is limited by the demographics and experiences of those working in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Since each participant’s experience is subject to the context of the community served, size of district, and its location within Kentucky, findings are limited to the personal experiences and perceptions of each female superintendent. Common themes among the responses by the six interviewees provide divergent and convergent perceptions of the lived-experience of political leadership.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to report how experienced Kentucky female superintendents perceive and enact political leadership through their reported lived-experiences of political leadership. Women view politics differently. When female

superintendents in this study moved through the labyrinth to obtain the district leader position, they developed and employed important political skills. Greater knowledge of how women establish relationships and influence others, along with collaborating with district constituents, provides key information for continued success. As research and preparation programs gain knowledge of female leadership strategies and actions, women may enter the superintendent role with more success.

Dissertation Organization

Chapter 2 provides a literature review of extant literature about female superintendents. Specifically, the reviewed literature describes barriers that women experience while seeking the top leadership position in P12 school districts, which requires political maneuvering as well as a current understanding about the political leadership role of a superintendent and the accompanying politics and power. Community groups, parents, district employees, and school board members are the constituency that a superintendent must serve. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative study including participant selection, data collection strategies, and iterative data analysis process. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the questionnaire completed by of Kentucky female superintendents as well as information about the lived-experiences of political leadership gathered from six experienced superintendents. Female superintendents identified four areas of political leadership: (a) preservice preparation, (b) their definition of political leadership, (c) behaviors of political leaders and (d) levels of political leadership. Chapter 5 presents conclusions about how female superintendents redefine political leadership and their behaviors, demonstrated a cyclical process of

political leadership found at both the local and state level.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the glass ceiling cracking, exploring how women lead through the labyrinth and navigate the political side of the superintendency enhances knowledge of female leadership. Research on how women lead provides information for female superintendency preparation programs as well as aspiring female superintendents. Previous research focused on barriers that kept women from obtaining the superintendency—a position in which White males traditionally have served in the role. Further, the superintendency often is viewed as a more authoritarian position because of the masculine definition of politics and power. In this literature review, research explains that women often see strategies to lead politically and use power differently from men, subscribing to a more shared leadership strategy of influence. At times, females, who viewed leadership in a shared or collective paradigm, encountered structures, boards, communities and teachers who found shared leadership foreign. However, with the advent of information technology (Eagly & Carli, 2007), the increase in diverse communities and a transforming discourse concerning superintendency, women leaders' values, norms, beliefs, as well as focus on social justice, and ethic of care bring change to district leadership.

This chapter outlines research concerning women superintendency in context of historical and current demographics of females serving as superintendent. A review of research about role socialization of the superintendency in addition to gender socialization establishes the top district leadership role in terms of societal expectations. In women's superintendent studies, much of the discussion about political leadership

focuses on power in the superintendency and power relations, which plays a critical role in the political paradigm. Women often have a different perspective of leadership, thus a discussion of women's research about leadership, power and politics follows. Our discussion ends with current knowledge and demographics concerning Kentucky women superintendents. The summary will seek to interweave these areas of research to frame the research concerns of this dissertation, reviewing research in the areas of power and political leadership by female superintendents.

History of Women Superintendency

The historical context of women's service in the superintendency provides an understanding of female struggles obtaining the position. Early in America's history, white men dominated the teaching profession. As females moved into the role of teacher, men dominated the role of school administrator. Viewed as appropriate for single women, serving as a teacher opened the door to the opportunity to earn income and be independent (Blount, 1998). Ella Flagg Young served as the first woman superintendent of Chicago schools in 1909. According to Blount, Ms. Young proclaimed women are destined to rule the schools in every city soon.

What Ella did not know was the number of women superintendents would drop from a high of 11% in the 1930's (Blount, 1998) to a low of 1% by 1980 (Grogan & Brunner, 2005b). Political and economic forces played a role in women superintendent emergence and decline. The women's suffrage movement at the turn of the 20th century supported the rise in women superintendents (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Higher education, state and federal policies acted in tandem to develop barriers to women (Alsbury, 2008; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). At the beginning of the 1930's, more states

began to require training and credentials to obtain the superintendent position as well as limiting female admissions to programs (Loss, 2012; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The return from WWII of males seeking employment and the GI Bill supported predominately male students to obtain higher education (Blount, 1998; Loss, 2012; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The external policy changes affected superintendent demographics, and therefore, women superintendents began to decline. As we look to the superintendency, white males dominate the position and have for more than a century (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Crowson, 1987; Skrla, 2000;).

Women superintendents began to rise in 1980 with a resurgence of a modern women's movement (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). During the last 25 years, a rise in accountability measures with superintendents moving from managerial to instructional leadership occurred. While more women moving into the position evolves, the inroads are minimal compared to the student population served in schools and the number of women employed in education (Glass, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005b; Kowalski et al, 2011; Shakeshaft et al, 2007; Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Pathways and Barriers for Females to the Superintendency

Female superintendents often experience similar pathways to the district position. Various positions along the pathway provide needed experiences and skills which provide a superintendent with political acuity. Women experience gender specific barriers that serve roadblocks to attaining the position. Barriers also require political maneuvering to move into the superintendency.

Pathways

For a large part, female superintendent research focused on pathways and barriers to the superintendency, extending knowledge of why women do not attain the superintendency. For this discussion, barriers, as well as alternative pathways to superintendency enlighten the extent of female knowledge and experiences, which prepare her for political leadership. Women often take alternative routes to the superintendent position than their male counterparts. Most females enter education through elementary positions, spending more time in the classroom, and ascend to an elementary administrative position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011; Tallerico, 1999). Women are twice as likely to have earned their undergraduate degree in education than men; 43.8% of women superintendents held their first teaching position in elementary schools while only 17% of male superintendents served at the primary level (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). The most common path to the superintendency passes through the secondary principal position from the classroom, a career path men frequently travel (Brunner and Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Tallerico, 2000).

The high school principal position is viewed as more complex, riddled with conflicts involving students and teachers that require answering questions from local media and high-stakes decision making (Tallerico, 2000). Serving as high school principal continues to be perceived as the best political preparation for the superintendency. Women also enter administrative positions through the district office without serving as principal at the local building level, thus failing to receive valued administrative experience necessary to obtain the superintendency. The career path for

females also requires more time than male counterparts and thus female candidates for superintendent are older than male candidates for the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan & Brunner, 2005c; Kowalski et al, 2011).

Barriers

Research concerning women superintendents in the last twenty years focused on barriers to the position. For women many barriers exist that hinder obtaining the top position in organizations, especially in male dominated fields; the superintendency is no different. Time commitments and role conflicts occur as females seek or are expected to continue the traditional roles of childcare and household responsibilities (Brunner, 2000a; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011;). Women strive for a balance between these sometimes-conflicting roles of home and work responsibilities. Women superintendents had little time to nurture intimate relationships. Friendships also fell to the wayside. Lack of privacy highlighted the high profile position with women superintendents attending to appearance at all times between dress and public actions including their social life. The roles of mother and household caretaker often differ with the demands of the superintendency resulting in stress until the female superintendent choreographed a resolution between the two roles.

Women face difficulty in obtaining the superintendency as board and community members often think of the superintendency as a male role (Oakley, 2000; Tallerico, 1999). Corporate practices create barriers for women to attain senior positions; in school districts, it is the superintendency. Alternative career pathways, as described before, generate one obstacle to overcome. Lack of sponsorship and mentoring serve as another

barrier to district leadership (Brunner, 2000a; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Other barriers embrace intangible behavioral explanations such as communication, leadership styles, exclusive networks, and differing attitudes toward power (Oakley, 2000). Behavioral barriers appear through gender socialization of both men and women. While specific gender socialization is discussed in the next section, characteristics and traits viewed as feminine impede women as they interview with predominately male boards and consultants. Generally, females are associated with gender-specific characteristics such as lack of aggressiveness, low confidence, and reluctance to take risks creating perceptual barriers to the position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Women seeking the superintendency lack the same mobility as men, narrowing females' search area for superintendent positions (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Lemasters & Roach, 2012; Tallerico, 1999). Women, who broke traditional gender-roles and sought positions that required mobility, often establish commuter marriages to take positions. Just as other female leaders perceive the need to be viewed as an expert in their position, women often seeking or obtaining the superintendency perceived the need to work harder than their male counterparts, obtaining more education, and working harder to prove a female can hold and perform the duties of the position (Brunner, 2000b Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan M., 1996; Yoder, 2001). Serving as an expert in their field lulled women into a false sense of security that performance and success as a superintendent relied solely on hard work protecting them from politics and power (Skla, Scott, & Benestante, 2001). Time, female role conflicts, mobility, feminine characteristics, networking,

mentoring, and established practices merge together to form barriers to women obtaining and continuing tenure as superintendent. The labyrinth to the position requires purposeful decisions to remove or minimize obstacles for women superintendents. Barriers and pathways launch women into the political arena before acquiring the position. Even though Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) acknowledge barriers are disappearing for women as more women enter the field, fewer barriers do not eradicate the politics to obtain and retain the position.

Role-Gender Socialization

Roles often are associated with preconceived norms of behavior, skills and characteristics. Roles generally held by one gender are associated with characteristics associated commonly with the particular gender. Because the superintendency is traditionally held by men, norms for the position are related to those norms associated with males. Gender socialization applies traits, behaviors or values thought to be feminine or masculine.

Role Socialization

Superintendent role socialization is contingent upon established community norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and characteristics (Björk et al., 2002; Skrla, 2000). Role socialization holds importance in this discussion as most of the norms established for the superintendency, arise from current superintendents, who are predominately male—presenting political hurdles to women seeking the superintendency. Helsel and Krchniak (1972) stated superintendents' professional role socialization includes the experiences of the individual as well as the acquisition of norms, values, and traditions or discourses of the profession. Superintendency research and discourse remains dominated

by male instituted standards of practice, philosophy, attitudes, language, values and goals (Grogan & Brunner, 2005a; Skrla, 2000).

Women who enter traditionally male dominated positions feel greater pressure to complete duties in the same manner as the males who occupied the position (Brunner, 2000a; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Tallerico, 2000). Community expectations frequently seek women's behavior to mirror their male counterparts (Shakeshaft et al, 2007). However, on occasions women are penalized when acting as a male because social beliefs dictate gender behavior differences, such as being authoritarian (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Yoder, 2001). Oakley (2000) refers to this as a double-bind, as a situation in which women act authoritatively (as men do) only to be perceived as being too aggressive.

Gender Socialization

Occupations dominated by a single sex may reflect the gender roles of the predominant sex. For the superintendency, role socialization discussed previously included traits and characteristics of men who most often served in the role. Female leaders shared they are often judged by gender, appearance, family life and perceptions of personality instead of results and accomplishments (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Skrla, 2000). Often female perceptions are grounded in gender-specific socialization (Shakeshaft, 2010) with three factors serving as influence on women behaviors: (a) socialization, (b) culture of origin and (c) organizational culture (Normane & Trinidad, 2005).

Gender-specific issues were often mentioned in women superintendent literature. The need for advanced degrees, strong work ethic, and connections to community power networks, as well as, male advocates for networking and seeking positions aid women in

obtaining and retaining the superintendency. Organizational culture is discussed in the midst of role socialization. Society norms for females and males continue to evolve, however, feminine discourse continues to affect how females are viewed, extending to expectations of female actions (Skrla, 2000). Female superintendents understand the norms provided to them and thus choose gender appropriate behaviors and actions, otherwise negative consequences occur (cf. Oakley, 2000; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). According to Eagly and Carli (2007), “Male leaders are expected to speak assertively, compete for attention, influence others and initiate activity. Female leaders expectations are to speak tentatively, not to draw attention to themselves, accept others’ suggestions, support others and solve relational problems”(p. 122).

Women do have the flexibility to modify their style in accordance with the leadership role and position. While females have been characterized as a softer gender, for female superintendents complex norms are developed and employed in precision to use appropriate feminine traits and/or masculine traits at appropriate times (Skrla, 2000). Female superintendents reported a sense of fearlessness, opening a door for risk-taking (Brunner, 2000). Females in the top role, describe enjoying challenges and meeting them with courage subscribing to a reverse discourse (Weedon, 1997). Reverse discourse challenges hegemonic discourse in meaning and power. Women also discarded the idea of acting in a masculine way and using power as used by male superintendents (Brunner, 2000b; Yoder, 2001). In order to be accepted, female superintendents stated their actions must subscribe to feminine socialization norms—including paying attention to others in a nurturing way.

Women leaders are empowered by the early messages they receive as daughters. Family relationships instill the ability to do anything, take risks, be creative and to dream of leadership (Gilligan, 1993). A strong family foundation enabled women superintendents to take risks and encouraging them in childhood to do anything they want (Brunner, 2000a). For female development, Gilligan explains relationships determine the course girls will take in life. Women often choose between having a voice and having relationships as early as adolescence according to Gilligan (2011). Female traditional role socialization at home is one of housework, child-care and care of others, messages women receive from childhood family experiences. Women perceive their world differently than men (Brunner, 2000a; Skrla, 2000). In decision making, females approach moral dilemmas in terms of relationships while male decisions are in terms of justice, rules and individual rights (Gilligan, 1993). Women value process and relationships while men emphasize outcomes and instrumentality in relationships in Helegesen (1990) study of managerial attitudes.

Communication

In Brunner's (2000a) study of 12 female superintendents, all reported communication served as the most important survival technique. Women found knowing your surroundings became one of the most important skills to retain the position, which included knowing the community and understanding community norms. According to Brunner, "Women superintendents need to develop the ability to remain "feminine" in the ways they communicate and at the same time be heard in their culture" (p.42). Brunner lists four challenges to communication: (a) being silenced by the term power, (b) overt silencing, (c) listening as different than silence, and (d) ways of communicating to

be heard. In Brunner's research, women had difficulty discussing power and stated association with positional power can be a detriment to acceptance and support as a female superintendent. Women superintendents experienced overt silencing through male board members' body language, interruptions, as well as being ignored by others. At times, board members conversed about inappropriate subject matter in which a female superintendent would not participate. Women reported the need to hide emotion as emotional responses were viewed as a sign of weakness. The superintendency presented a pressing need to listen, which at times can be seen as silence by others. Female superintendents reported listening as necessary to serve collaboratively with others.

When asked questions about communicating to be heard, the female superintendents in Brunner's study focused on communication with men. Being heard required women to adopt a "softer style" using a less directive speech in order to get things across. At times, women used a male spokesperson to be heard. Effective women superintendents carefully chose their language and employed a quiet persistence in the timing of presenting ideas. Preparation served as key to bringing thoughts forward. Women superintendents brought gender-related strategies to the table in order to communicate effectively with boards, business leaders and community members.

Superintendent Roles

In the 1966, Callahan identified four roles of the superintendency: (a) instructional leader, (b) manager, (c) statesman/political leader, and (d) applied social scientist (Björk & Gurley, 2005). A fifth role, communicator, was designated by Kowalski (2001) in the past decade. Each role identified by Callahan categorized the superintendency during an era. Callahan viewed the superintendent roles as evolving

over time and thus changing. The focus on political leadership began in the 1930s, according to Callahan with the stock market crash and continued until the mid-1950s. Callahan suggests the role of political leader evolved as the superintendent became a lobbyist for dwindling resources beginning in the 1930s. In a 20-year period, education focused on creating citizens who supported a democratic society, in turn needed district leadership from a political statesman (Björk & Gurley, 2005; Loss, 2012). Scarce fiscal resources required superintendents to become advocates for funds as school systems competed for resources with other public needs. As the role of social scientist emerged, superintendents were asked to use social sciences to address larger societal programs. With this brings the increase polarity of community groups and the lack of consensus concerning the focus of education. These shifts forced superintendents into community political roles (Alsbury, 2008).

Cuban (1988) suggests three concurrent superintendent roles: managerial, instructional and political which ebb and flow in emphasis and context. Cuban's view of political leadership placed the superintendent, acting as a negotiator-statesman, in the midst of conflict citing continuous debates amongst groups. Politics becomes the use of daily tasks to reach goals. Political leadership remains a necessary role among superintendents as educational resources dwindle.

While the five roles may be intertwined in superintendency, each role differs depending on the community power structure (Björk et al., 2002a). Schools are many times thought of as apolitical and an arena where politics should not be involved in decision making. Superintendents negotiate conflicts, advocate for social justice, seek limited resources and distribute both resources and a vision to initiate change. Change

requires influencing others, placing the superintendent in the role of political strategist (Björk & Gurley, 2005). The current educational climate with accountability measures, increased special interests, and fewer funds requires a political strategist to negotiate and advocate for the district.

An effective political leader negotiates multiple interests to obtain resources, and to initiate change to benefit students. The superintendency is driven by political responsibilities to complex pluralistic communities in which student achievement has become the measurement of success (Björk, Bell, & Gurley, 2002; Brunner, Grogan, & Björk, 2002; Grogan & Brunner, 2005a). The term, *statesman*, reoccurs in superintendent literature. Statesman suggests a masculine role and by its very nature deletes women from the discussion. Men and masculine traits are often associated with the role of political leader (Newton, 2006; Skrla, 2000). In the 2010 AASA survey, 88% of women superintendents reported their school board placed moderate and substantial emphasis on the political role of the superintendency (Kowalski et al, 2011).

Political Leadership

Just like all organizations, politics infiltrates school systems from external pressures of board, parents, community, and state and federal mandates, to internal constituents of administrators, teachers, staff personnel, and students. The perception of students' needs receiving the highest priority in school districts suggests an apolitical nature to the educational system. However, the political arena in school districts exist because setting educational priorities through curriculum, special services, facilities, and personnel are viewed differently by constituents. Board and superintendent decisions become the catalyst for conflict between funded and unfunded priorities, thus the birth of

the political side of the superintendency. Wirt and Kirst (2009) argue conflict ensues from internal and external constituents placing superintendents “in a political web of pressures with the local actors, all coping with external influences” (p. 194). The democratic process continues to grow in education as more constituencies seek participation, suggesting the superintendency is more political than before (Björk & Gurley, 2005).

Bolman and Deal (2013) propose five basic political assumptions setting the framework to explain individual and group interest in organizations:

- Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.
- Coalition members have enduring difference in values, beliefs, information, interest, and perceptions of reality.
- Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources, deciding who gets what.
- Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
- Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. (pp. 188-189)

The district is the organization; the above assumptions demonstrate the inherent conflict between groups as both superintendent and school board act as decision-makers. Cyert and March (1963) viewed organizations such as school districts as coalitions in which the bargaining process between constituents breeds decisions. The bargaining agent between these coalitions is the superintendent, who ultimately in conjunction with the school board is the decision-maker. Therefore, political leadership in action is the way in which superintendents deal with conflict, negotiate with groups (internal and external), listen and respond to constituents, distribute resources and achieve goals in the context of external pressure placed by state and federal policies. The political frame

views power in numerous ways, while authority provides some decisions, coalitions and individuals vie for power to seek scarce resources.

A superintendent, who possesses political acumen, builds consensus among constituents, by seeking support for district initiatives as she represents the district. School boards seek change agents who can also respond to the demands of the community (Bjork et al., 2005). The diverse requirements of the political dimension of superintendency complicate access to women superintendents who seek to navigate conflicts (Bjork et al., 2002; Bjork & Gurley, 2005). Grogan (2003) suggests a reconceptualization of the superintendency as a response to the social, political, and economic forces. Reconceptualization suggests political efficacy as the superintendent strives to (a) be comfortable with contradiction, (b) work through others, (c) appreciate dissent, (d) develop awareness of how students are served and (e) adopt an “ethic of care” (Grogan, 2003, p. 22).

Boals (1975) proposed that politics consists of justice which requires the fair distribution of goods among group members. For schools, justice is comprised of an ethic of care that forces attention to others in the fair sharing of resources and opportunities (Brunner, 2000a). The social scientist’s side of superintendency ties to the political allocation of resources for women. Brunner suggests this reality stating women prioritize relationships and children’s needs, changing the superintendent norms. Open systems leadership, collective leadership, brings collective power, from both internal and external environment. As a superintendent forms coalitions, relationships and networks, she openly engages the community as agents enacting change.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) explain collective leadership capitalizes on relationships, events and activities moving the educational setting toward a shared vision. Collective leadership creates a relationship with the external environment, which opens systems to community input. Producing solidarity in diverse communities requires seizing opportunity to sculpt groups together to form a community network. The shared or collective leadership of women draws upon input from others, as well as empowering others to lead. With this type of leadership, conflict occurs as groups and individuals differ in wants and needs.

Women Leadership Strategies

Women superintendents prefer *power with* employees, board members, and community groups. Relational power brings benefits to others in lieu of an individual's profit. Relationships are a key component of collaboration, cooperation and enhancing others' self-worth (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Engen, 2003). Transformational leadership emphasizes the collaborative and participative nature of leadership in concert with a vision for the future (Eagly, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Transformational leadership is often characterized by (a) influence or charisma, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) individual consideration, and (d) intellectual stimulation, all commonly found in women leadership studies (Pounder & Coleman, 2002).

Women superintendents often informally place a more lateral structure into place than the traditional, top down hierarchal structure (Cheung & Halpern, 2010; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). While positional power occurs with obtainment of the superintendency, women capitalize on relationships for input and power. Rather than implementing hierarchal structures as leaders, women sought to make more of a web

structure of connected relationship (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Women value relationships and tie human resource strategies with political strategies to exert power and influence. The passion and values expounded by women leaders exude from a strong need for connectedness and justice. Leadership continues to evolve just as organizations change and grow. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) propose that women educational leaders conceive organizational leadership as residing *with* others and not through the individual, supporting the perception of female superintendents who view power through the lens of shared or collective working *with* others to support change. The following approaches of women educational leaders: (a) leadership for learning, (b) leadership for social justice, (c) relational leadership, (d) spiritual leadership and (e) balanced leadership outline female leadership behaviors (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). While these behaviors are not exclusive to female educational leaders, in general, women identify with the previous five leadership approaches.

Females working in the education field view their role as instructional leader paramount over all other duties and responsibilities. Women, who participated in the AASA 2010 decennial study, were much more likely to respond their school board placed substantial emphasis on the role of political leadership (Kowalski et al., 2011). Women's drive for leadership for learning carries over to the ethic of care for students and the social justice for those in need. While spiritual leadership may be tied to religious belief, women also view spiritual leadership as reflection, self-awareness, balance and peace (Brunner, 2000a). Women see spiritual leadership as serving as a role model for others. Spirituality gave female leaders hope and resilience necessary to enact change.

Power and Conflict

Previous women superintendent research explores women superintendents' perceptions of power (Brunner, 1999; Brunner, 2000a, 2000b; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005a; Katz, 2006). Women's research, about female political behavior or female political leadership, discusses power in which women's differing strategies enacted when using power are in stark contrast to those of male colleagues. Women employ a transformational-shared leadership strategy when serving as a political leader who influences others. Power precedes the discussion of conflict as the former produces the latter.

Power

According to Grogan and Brunner (2005a), more emphasis on the role of political leadership may indicate women superintendents serve in pluralistic communities where the school board expects the superintendent to seek support from groups for educational initiatives. Within diverse communities, power serves to negotiate conflicts involving diversity versus resources. The political maneuvering of differences among district constituents places power as a mechanism of our social existence. Effective women superintendents chose their battles carefully, keeping their agendas simple and saving their clout to battle the issues that really matter—the district's children. Historically, superintendents are not reported to be risk-takers. Risk-taking becomes a true factor in leadership and change with women superintendents stating the importance of risk-taking for success (Brunner, 2000a). Risks support creativity and innovation necessary to solve complex district problems.

Power and politics are interrelated, each needing the other for survival.

Reviewing power and power relations (Watson & Grogan, 2005) provide insight into organizational leadership and how influence occurs in relationships. Many forms of power emerge in organizations, each with merit and influence. The superintendency has many complex relationships, which weave a web of political discourse from inside the district with central office personnel, local school administrators and teachers to the greater community consisting of parents, school boards, community leaders, and special interest groups. These power relations between superintendent and others serve as the conduit for superintendents' influence. Superintendents work to build power relationships with all these groups to be an effective leader.

Many studies focus on the hierarchal nature of power based in the structure of the organization, one of power *over*, control over and domination of subordinates (Pfeffer, 2005). When looking at power versus politics, Pfeffer asserts, "Power is the property of the system at rest; politics is power in action" (p. 292). Pfeffer explains power is relationship dependent requiring social actors who may be made up of individuals, groups or organizations. French and Raven (2005) define power as a "relation between two agents which occurs from two perspectives: (a) what determines the behavior of the agent exerting power and (b) what is the reaction of the individual from the agent's behavior?" (p. 311). Power is the ability to influence others, be a catalyst of change, overcome barriers, and bring individuals and groups together in action for the common good (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Kruse & Prettyman, 2008; Pfeffer, 1992). Women superintendents often comment as acting as a change agent (Kowalski et al., 2011) requiring power and conflict.

When an individual possesses power, she is required to do something to keep her power. While position often defines authority, the real power comes as a leader uses various forms of power to get things done, which occurs through positional, reward, coercive, expert, personal (referent) or political power (Bolman & Deal, 2013; French & Raven, 2005; Yukl, 2013). Table 2.1 found below defines sources of power.

Table 2.1 French and Raven's Sources of Power

Power	Description
Position/Legitimate	Formal authority conferred position (French & Raven, 2005)
Reward	Ability to control important resources and rewards (Yukl, 2013)
Coercive	Ability to constrain, block, interfere, or punish (Bolman & Deal, 2013)
Expert	Ability to solve problems and possess unique knowledge, skill or information (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Yukl, 2013)
Referent/Personal	Informal authority through others who perceive charisma, energy, stamina, political smarts, vision or other characteristics (Bolman & Deal, 2013)

One possessing power controls decisions, which influence policy, planning and resources distribution. While the superintendency holds positional power in the districts' political arena, with the current political climate, superintendent positional power has eroded as this once controlling position is disseminated to elected boards, school-based decision making councils, state and federal accountability measures and so forth (Brunner et al., 2002; Shibles, Rallis, & Deck, 2001; Watson & Grogan, 2005). Thus, the political dimension is exacerbated as communities hold superintendents accountable for knowing and communicating the need for reforms and to bring about change to school structures and practices. Even though the superintendency carries positional power, women continue to need gender-related strategies to navigate the political leadership role.

Female superintendents shied away from positional or coercive power instead employed referent/personal power (Stanford, Oates, & Flores, 1995).

Women's Perceptions of Power

In education, the superintendent's position brings power because of the hierarchal district structure. Brunner (2000a) explains in the United States men are often drawn to social roles, which expect them to exercise power *over* others, subsequently, female gender roles establish women discourses of power *with* others. Women often are uncomfortable being described as powerful and believe power increases when it is shared (Brunner, 2000a; Fennell, 2002; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Katz, 2006; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Power created through relationships brings opportunities for empowerment, thus a female superintendent receives power when she gives power. Women superintendents reported communication with others could not be perceived as power in the traditional sense (i.e., *power over*) in order to be accepted and supported (Brunner, 2000a). Women used alternative practices of power *with* others to meet feminine socialization norms. Decision-making strategies built upon listening and gathering input supported relational leadership. As Grogan (1998) found that women often admitted power *over* others lurked backstage during power moments; however, women often chose power *with* others not only because of their belief in this strategy of leadership but also the negative consequences each believed she faced using power *over* strategies.

In contrast, Merrill-Sands et al. (2005) stated women are often undecided about power but are comfortable with power. Women perceive sharing power creates loyalty, enhances communication flow and enables the leader to hear about issues before she is blindsided (Schaap, 2014). Female leaders prefer *power with* others verses *power over*

others (Brunner, 2000a, 2000b; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Kruse & Prettyman, 2008; Shakeshaft, 2010; Shakeshaft et al., 2007) because *power with* others capitalizes on socialized power relying on relationships, which look to benefit others, or achieve goals (Brunner, 2000a; Schaap, 2014; Shakeshaft, 2010). In contrast, *power over* seizes personalized power for the good of the individual. Women leaders tend to employ relational leadership and moral power to bring about change (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 2010).

Power with

Power *with* others has emerged as a more transformational form of leadership, seeking a collaborative environment of shared leadership. From an early age females learn to define themselves in relation to others—connections to others (Gilligan, 1993). Men seek individuality and women seek connectedness. According to Leithwood (1995), this facilitative power transforms politics into education, providing the key to a successful superintendency. Brunner (1999) suggests relational power enables the effective superintendent to draw upon others to meet pluralistic needs. The superintendency requires a complex understanding of power and power relations in the unique context of each community and local social structures (Grogan, 1996; Watson & Grogan, 2005). Grogan (1996) expounds women superintendents' strengths hinged on human relationships that indicated more facilitating, lateral leadership than hierarchal approach (Brunner, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Hesitation occurs with a more collaborative leadership approach, suggesting some internal power relations in organizations may not positively receive relational power from the superintendent.

Females employing power *with* other individuals, empowering others as they serve, experience greater positive feedback. Power *with* others sets the new discourse of the superintendency and supports the innate female socialized role to collaborate. Supporting a relational leadership approach, power *with* others draws upon the importance of sharing power with others to women, believing power increases as it is shared (Brunner, 2000a; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Sampson, Gresham, Applewhite, & Roberts, 2015). Women superintendents seek input in decision-making situations, through building relationships, supporting professional growth of others, and listening. A relational leader folds input from constituents into her decisions (Brunner, 2000a; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Relational leadership is the vehicle for women to drive change, change often viewed through a social justice lens for underserved students. Brunner's (2000) study brought to the forefront the key of superintendency for women—caring relationships. An *ethic of care* Noddings (1994) underlies relationships and decision making, as moral decisions for women rely on feelings, needs and impressions along with a sense of personal ideal (Brunner, 2000a, 2000b).

Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in the superintendency (Cuban, 1984). Viewed as part of the process of organizational management and leadership, conflict is a natural by-product of shared leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The ethical side of superintendent decision making fails to acknowledge how coalitions form with conflicting agendas, which may negate student priority. Pluralist values, norms and needs set the stage for community conflicts for education priorities. Conflict arises with the very nature of political leadership in public education (Björk & Gurley, 2005). Superintendents must participate

in community debate through democratic processes. Political leadership requires looking at strategies and tactics for conflict resolution. Conflict brings about change stimulating creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. The management of conflict becomes the key to the political leader: striving for a balance between promoting innovation and stifling growth within the boundaries of resources. Whether between groups or societal conflicts, both seep into district decision-making when it comes to allocating resources. An effective superintendent balances conflict to serve the vision of the system as well as promote the function of daily activities through negotiations and input from others.

Women Leadership and Power

Leadership requires many components for success. In a study of 12 women leaders, Stanford et al. (1995) developed a woman's leadership model combining both females' views of power along with the female leadership styles found in Figure 2.1.

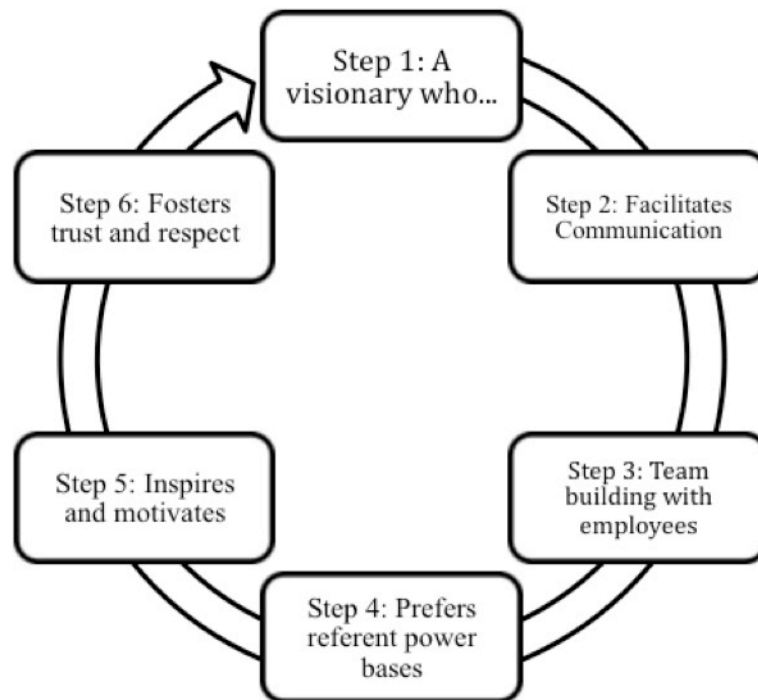


Figure 2.1 A Woman's Leadership Model suggested by Stanford, Oates and Flores, (1995). Permission to use this figure was granted by the authors to use for this research.

The model demonstrates women's preference for referent power capitalizing on employee involvement. Women leaders communicate a vision and motivate others through fostering mutual respect and trust with employees. Stanford, Oates and Flores' (1995) model of female leadership synthesizes research of transformational, and collaborative leadership with referent power. The female qualities of communication—respect and trust—support a lateral or web-like structure of leadership.

Constituents

District constituents include internal (i.e., teachers, administrators and district employees) and external groups (i.e., community leaders, school board, parents, special interest groups, state and federal officials). Both internal and external constituents want input in to decision as well as communication with the superintendent. All groups have various levels of influence in district decision making.

Community Politics

As women entered the superintendent position, women superintendents stated success depended upon understanding their surroundings, the communities and district organizations' culture, as well as possessing a strong self-awareness. Findings from Brunner's (2000a) study suggest that for women knowing the community also consisted of an awareness of community expectations for a woman superintendent. Grogan (2003) affirms the need of the superintendent's political efficacy stating today's superintendent must be able to form coalitions in order to accomplish district initiatives. Human relationship skills walk hand-in-hand with the politics of a pluralistic community. In a district setting, the superintendent must understand, collaborate, and serve with the many groups (formal and informal) that make up the district, requiring political acuity.

Superintendents often deal with competing interests from individuals, school board, community, teachers, and parents. The superintendency has become one of negotiated and renegotiated trust (Grogan, 2003) in which superintendents spend an increasingly significant amount of time building coalitions among constituents. A growing number of conflicting voices now arise in communities, seeking superintendent attention. Our diverse society brings numerous expectations to education including participating in policy and decision-making (Keedy & Björk, 2002).

Community voices demand greater participation along with internal constituents seeking participation in decision-making. Bolman and Deal (2008) view organizations of coalitions who have different values, beliefs, information, interests and perceptions. Each district presents unique cultures, personalities and groups in which the superintendent must build relationships, forge coalitions and bring together to work toward district goals. An effective superintendent identifies community cultures and seeks to involve the community through (a) seeking community input, (b) extending the school into the community, (c) placing emphasis on benefits of strong educational district, (d) bringing community members into schools, (e) providing facilities for community use and programs, and (f) providing volunteers to the community (Owens & Ovando, 2000). The superintendent seeks to negotiate various groups to bring about participation and change in the district. In conjunction with the school board and community leaders, networks become invaluable in understanding opinions and needs.

School Boards

A superintendent's success and tenure often hinges on her relationship with the school board, demonstrated by 83% of respondents to the AASA 2010 decennial survey

affirming the challenge of working with the board (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Superintendents act in four roles depending on the context school board power structures: a functionary role of implementing policy, political strategist who sides with the majority, a professional advisor giving advice, or a decision maker who initiates action and provides leadership (Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Bjork et al., 2002a; McCarty & Ramsey, 1968). Community power structures determine the roles superintendents utilize. Politics and political culture of each state may be traditional, moralistic and individualistic (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Febey & Louis, 2008). Traditional political cultures seek to maintain political, social and economic hierarchy continuing the status quo. Moralistic cultures seek citizens' input in maintaining the welfare of all citizens with emphasis on economic equality. Finally, individualistic cultures support private and economic concerns limiting government. State political cultures infiltrate district policies and special interest groups using education as a pawn in the politics.

School boards continue to watch local power erode, lessening the influence of the board and superintendent, as state and federal educational programs and mandates dictate funds, standards and measures. In pluralistic communities, especially urban areas, diverse community needs limit the positional influence of boards, as well as superintendents (Watson & Grogan, 2005). The aspirations, values, and interest of each community require the superintendent to develop and implement educational services that meet the diverse needs of the community (Leithwood, 1995). Accountability for academic progress among all district students requires the understanding of students' diverse needs by the superintendent (Watson & Grogan, 2005). Macropolitics of school systems have reached new highs with greater demands on schools, conflict about the

purpose of schooling, and more costly pluralistic needs of students are in direct conflict with decreasing resources; thus, making school districts political arenas (Wirt & Kirst, 2009).

School boards also have a four-power structure which affect the superintendent and boards' interactions: (a) dominated, (b) factional, (c) pluralistic, and (d) inert structures (Bjork & Gurley, 2005; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Kowalski, 2006). Under a dominant school board, a few elite board members possess the power which results in a the superintendent becoming only a functionary leader. A factional school board structure splinters among community special interest according to agendas. Superintendents become true politicians working and negotiating between factional interests. A pluralistic structure among the board disperses power among members with coalitions forming according to issues at hand. In pluralistic structures superintendents often act as a facilitator offering information and professional recommendations. Inert power structures show little interest in serving as school board members seeking only to approve most administrative decisions made by the superintendent. With inert power structures, the superintendent is the main decision-maker. When school board and superintendent relationships possess similar ideas of power, using power *with*, the two entities act collaboratively and are more productive for the district (Mountford & Brunner, 2001). Boards often serve their own political needs and agendas with political aspirations for the future, which is counterproductive to the board and superintendents relationship.

Mentoring and Peer Networks

Mentoring supports and influences an individual's behavior if it occurs immediately before or as the individual begins as superintendent (Björk et al., 2002a). Mentoring accelerates the socialization into a profession and is an important aspect of acquiring professional and political socialization of the superintendency (Björk et al., 2002a; Enrich & Hansford, 2004). Women often lack a strong network, role models, or mentors supporting them for the superintendent position (Brunner, 2000a; Lemaster & Roach, 2012; Muñoz, Mills, Pankake & Whaley, 2014; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Mentorships provide the novice superintendent opportunities to learn role socialization such as political realities (Iselt, Brown, & Irby, 2001). Mentorships and networking increase the visibility as a woman seeks the superintendency (Grogan, 1996).

The more we know about women superintendents' perceptions, preparation, mentoring and socialization of the role, the greater likelihood of women obtaining the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Brown & Irby, 2005; Grogan & Brunner, 2005b). Networks provide informal connections for superintendents to seek support; without these connections women often experience barriers to the superintendent position. Connections proved to be critical in order to move through the labyrinth. Brunner (2000a) found many women did not have mentors and those who did often had a male mentor into the superintendency. New female superintendents benefitted from male mentors but sought female mentors for gender specific advice (Copeland, 2013). However, in Brunner and Grogan's analysis of women assistant/associate/deputy superintendents found 84% of respondents served as a mentor to aspiring administrators.

Women may find more comfort with the role and less competition to survive as superintendent as more women enter the position.

Williams, Miller and Fiene (2007) noted Kentucky women superintendents explained mentors helped them balance the needs of different interest groups. A variety of people served as mentors: school board, local business leaders, teachers, principals, and other superintendents. Mentors supported and encouraged their mentees to expend political capital through articulating children are the priority (Williams et al., 2007). Networks supported aspiring individuals to move into the superintendency as well as aided in balancing special interest groups' needs.

Demographics of Women Superintendents

The current picture of female superintendents demonstrates an increase in the number of women in the top district position. In Kentucky, as well as nationally, women superintendents serve all sizes of districts. However, women are more likely to serve in diverse communities. Women perceive their selection contingent on their ability to serve as an instructional leader.

National Women Superintendent Demographics

The number of female superintendents nearly doubled in the last decade, showing the cracks in the glass ceiling. In the AASA 2010 decennial study, female superintendents increased to 24.1% from 13.2% in 2000 (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011). While the percentage of women serving as superintendent has increased, the number remains woefully behind the national population and the number of females employed in the education field. At this rate of increase it will take women until the year 2035 to obtain a 50-50 gender ratio in the superintendency (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008).

Female superintendents completed more formal education than their male counterparts, with more women holding a doctorate in both 2000 and the 2010 AASA surveys (Glass et al., 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005b; Kowalski et al., 2011).

District enrollment. Women were thought to serve in small less desirable districts. However, in the AASA 2010 decennial survey of superintendents, the percentage of females that served districts were similar to those of men in district geographic descriptors and diversity (Kowalski et al., 2011). Women were more likely to serve diverse student populations than men. Kowalski and colleagues (2011) found an increase of women serving in larger districts with enrollments of 3,000-24,999 from the 2000 survey (Glass et al., 2000). In the 2010 survey, women superintendents responded the primary reason for their selection was their ability to be an instructional leader, followed by acting as a potential change agent. While district size in the 2010 survey demonstrates a greater distribution of women in all district sizes, Newton (2006) gives caution to the seemingly equality between male and female superintendent service in regards to district enrollment. An unwritten hierarchy of school districts exists built upon desirability of the district in the areas of (a) wealth, (b) geographic location, (c) student achievement, (d) district size, (e) and type of student population (Bell, 1988; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). The supply and demand of qualified candidates matched to most and least attractive districts support the hiring of men in desirable districts and thus women superintendents were thought to obtain positions in least desirable settings (Newton, 2006). Larger districts are more likely to hire women superintendents and often have diverse needs in the community (Brunner, 2000a; Kim, 2013; Kowalski et al., 2011).

Kentucky Female Superintendents

Limited data from Kentucky women superintendents appears from dissertation and survey work. Williams et al., (2007) interviewed Kentucky women superintendents and found similar data to those of previous literature. Kentucky women superintendents collaborated with others seeking input. Subordinates described the leadership style of Kentucky superintendents as one that builds capacity, delegates, empowers, and communicates within the confines of student achievement. Female superintendents displayed visionary leadership, viewing themselves as change agents. Kentucky women superintendents possessed a strong moral compass composed of leadership traits of (a) integrity, (b) trustworthiness, (c) empathy, (d) being level-headed, (e) being strong (f) work ethic, (g) honesty and (h) perserverance (Williams et al., 2007). Kentucky female superintendents found entry into the position hinged on on the following: (a) ability to manage conflict, (b) preparation for the position, (c) knowledge of finances, and (d) supportive networks. Compton (2004) found the lack of mentoring among Kentucky female superintendents, hindered the learning of necessary political skills. Ten of the 12 women in Compton's qualitative study served in small districts of 300-3000 in student enrollment. Conflict management captialized on their relational skills and intuitive sense.

In the 2002, the State Action for Education Leadership Policy (SAELP) superintendent survey, 10.3% of respondents were women. In the survey, both men and women superintendents were asked about barriers limiting opportunities for women. The top three barriers chosen were (a) lack of mobility of family members, (b) the nature of the work makes it an unattractive career choice and (c) perceptions that women will allow their emotions to influence administrative decisions (Björk, Keedy, Rinehart, & Winter,

2002b). When asked what factors helped to advance careers of women, the top organizational factor from responses was the board's willingness to hire a women. Women superintendents also believed possessing strong knowledge of curriculum and instruction along with the ability to maintain relationships and interpersonal skills helped women obtain the superintendency.

District enrollments served by female superintendents. As of March 1, 2015, 33 women serve as superintendent in Kentucky, making up approximately 19% of all superintendents in the state. The commonwealth's percentage of women superintendents is lower than the national average. Figure 2.1 shows the district enrollment currently served by women superintendent in Kentucky (KDE, 2014a). District enrollment categories emulate those of the AASA decennial study. Fifty-seven districts boast enrollment totals of 3,000-24,999 in Kentucky with 12 headed by women superintendents. Two districts boast an enrollment of more than 25,000 with the largest headed by a female.

Female superintendent tenure. Reviewing the tenure of current Kentucky female superintendents in the context of district size, most women are currently in the first of their four year contract. Most female superintendents' contracts were written for a four year term (KDE, 2014a, 2014b).

Summary

The drop in female district leadership from 1930 required almost a century for the number of women to return to the superintendent position. Even with this return, women superintendents continue to remain significantly lower than the number of women educators. Previous research reveals significant barriers to aspiring women

superintendents, however, the glass ceiling appears to have cracked with females maneuvering through the labyrinth to serve as superintendent. In light of a doubling of

Table 2.2

Gender and District Enrollment of Kentucky Women Superintendents

District Enrollment	Number of Female Superintendents	Percentage
Fewer than 300	1	3
300-2,999	19	58
3000-24,999	12	36
25,000 or more	1	3
Total	33	100

Table 2.3

Kentucky Female Superintendents Tenure of Current Contract and District Size

District Enrollment	Tenure of Current Contract					Total by District Size
	0 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	
Under 300				1		1
300-2,999	3	7	5	5		19
3,000-24,999	1	5	3	2	1	12
2,5000 +				1		1
Total by Tenure	4	12	8	9	1	33

the number of women superintendents in the last decade and the emphasis on shared leadership styles, reviewing the topic of political leadership, especially power, may be viewed differently by women in 2014. As accountability efforts increase supporting

collaborative leadership strategies in education, women leaders' empowerment and belief in working *with* others may fulfill the changing role of the school district leader.

Throughout the literature review of women superintendents, many researchers touted female strategies and leadership styles in a positive light. While the discussion of male superintendents is not the intent of this study, the reviewer noted a lack of a challenge to feminine leadership strategies. On the contrary, found in the literature are issues viewed as cultural or gender specific issues that look at societal issues for change. Female superintendent research might be served with a more critical review of how women lead.

Women superintendents perceive themselves as instructional leaders first, the traditional female pathways to superintendency and years in the classroom denote this leaning. Instructional leaders push for change and view instructional improvement in context of social justice (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 2010). Acting as change agents, women work as political leaders negotiating and sharing a vision as they seek input from constituents. Conflict arises as interest groups, community leaders, school board members and internal constituents differ in the direction of the district and the decisions made to enact change. The literature provides a strong foundation in how women view power, and decision making and the various groups that must be bargained and negotiated with to achieve change.

Women superintendent research defines women's use of power as power *with* others. This transformational leadership style seeks power and change through collaborative input. Today's superintendents, leading a growing number of pluralistic communities, requires the input of all to work through various groups necessary for

change. School boards, community groups, internal district constituents, seek input, a voice, in the growing democratic nature of school systems. Female collaborative leadership includes empowering others, which in turn, in the woman superintendents' view brings her power. The focus of the IPA study presented in chapter 3 sought to understand how a Kentucky female superintendent perceived the role of political leadership, examining her political behaviors and how she influences and obtains power.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research explored female superintendents' perceptions and practices of political leadership through a qualitative approach called Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), according to Smith and colleagues (2009). The research design included use of a preliminary online questionnaire administered to all female superintendents in Kentucky followed by a series of two interviews with six female superintendents with four or more years of experience as a district leader. This chapter describes the data collection and analysis strategies and discusses the quality assurance checks used and potential limitations of the study.

Significance

Findings from this study enhance the understanding of political leadership as perceived by experienced Kentucky female superintendents. The recent increase nationally in the number of female superintendents suggests that women are successfully navigating through barriers that previously restricted women from obtaining that position in the past. Much of existing research on women superintendents focuses on barriers and alternative perspectives of females concerning the superintendency and leadership. Current research in the field calls for greater knowledge about how women lead (Björk, 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The study on political leadership seeks to understand how women perceive and practice the superintendent's political role. The context of managing and collaborating with various internal and external constituents with fewer resources brings conflict and politics to the role of superintendent. Understanding how women view political leadership, foster relationships within the political frame, and use

leadership strategies provides knowledge for aspiring female superintendents and information for superintendent preparation programs and professional development opportunities.

Context

This study was situated within the Commonwealth of Kentucky and invited all female superintendents serving in 2015 to participate in the questionnaire at the launch of data collection. Females served as superintendents in districts ranging in enrollment from under 300 students to the largest district in the state with approximately 100,000 students. Although nationally, the number of female superintendents has nearly doubled in the last decade, within Kentucky approximately 19% of all superintendents are female, a rate currently below the national average of 24%. At the beginning of data collection, women served as superintendents in districts located in all nine special education service center areas across the Commonwealth.

Design of the Study

A qualitative, two-phase approach was used to gather perceptions and practices concerning political leadership among all currently practicing female superintendents in Kentucky. Qualitative research focuses on lived-experiences of individuals, capturing the perspectives of those individuals in their natural setting (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Maxwell, 2005). However, Schlozman, Burns, Verba and Donahue (1995) find shortcomings in many studies of the superintendency with more quantitative approaches because they use an underlying foundation of thoughts reflective of male conceptions of leadership, politics, and power (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 2010). In contrast, a less restrictive qualitative investigation was more appropriate to collect the

different voices of women because an interview provides the vehicle through which a woman can express her understanding of experiences (Gilligan, 1993). Qualitative studies enable complex research to become more comprehensible by adding meaning and understanding through rich descriptive text (Merriam, 2009).

Phenomenological Study

Dropping preconceived notions concerning phenomena creates the foundation for phenomenological research and most other qualitative research strategies. Each participant's case tells the story of how she viewed the phenomena from her lived-experiences, and the collective stories of all participants present a description of the phenomenon examined. As a constructivist approach, phenomenology suggests participants' realities and meanings are the basis of study (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Phenomenology guards against assumptions from theories, discourse, science, or other values and prejudices that exist in daily life (Van Manen, 2014). Phenomenology research examines the world as individuals experience it and allows them to become conscious about their experiences before researchers conceptualized, abstract, or theorize the phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014)

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Multiple cycles IPA enabled me to collect study participants' ideas, thoughts, and experiences about the phenomenon at different times. This study used IPA to identify perceptions of experienced Kentucky female superintendents concerning political leadership practices. Three theoretical perspectives—phenomenology, hermeneutics, idiography—set the foundation for this IPA study that sought to explore experiences and how female superintendents made sense of their experiences (Fade, 2004; Smith, 2004;

Smith et al., 2009). The pursuit of the perceptions requires the researcher and participants to put aside those things taken for granted and transform the discussion of phenomenon into a dynamic activity (Smith et al., 2009).

Participants in this study are asked to make sense of the phenomenon—female superintendents as political leaders—by providing their accounts of working as a political leader and by capturing their reflections about those experiences. Each account became dependent upon the participant’s experiences followed by an interpretation of data collected by me in order to understand her experience (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Phenomena are thus defined as lived-through experiences as each event appears in an individual’s consciousness (Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 2014).

Hermeneutics interprets perceptions in a circular fashion of constant movement between examining the part and the whole at various levels. IPA is described as an “iterative and inductive cycle” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79.) through which the researcher seeks to make sense of the participant’s thinking while the participant makes sense of the phenomenon (Smith, 2011). The hermeneutics circle is an essential part of understanding how the parts interpret the whole and then the whole is interpreted by its parts. During this interpretive analysis, reflective practices and bracketing are necessary. The researcher thus works as a detective to bring forth a phenomenon and then make sense of it. Before and during the analysis, the researcher must acknowledge or bracket off his or her preconceptions.

Idiography explores the particular phenomenon through the perceptions of the participants about the context and people involved and through detailed accounts of purposively selected and situated samples or cases. Each case can stand alone,

challenging existing assumptions, preconceptions, and theories. The researcher completes a detailed examination of each case until achieving a sense of closure and only then pursues analysis of the second case. For this study, each case contains an essence of political leadership particular to specific female superintendent's recollection and perception. Once all individual cases were thoroughly analyzed, I then conducted a cross-case analysis to identify commonalities and differences concerning the phenomenon (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Findings gathered through IPA are to be expressed in its terms of study participants' lived-experiences rather than in terms of theory or conceptual constructs.

Study Focus

This study examined experienced Kentucky female superintendents' perceptions and practices of political leadership that are tied to the context of each superintendent's experiences, community, networks, and district context. This focus on context ensured uniqueness in profiles about each participant's experiences. The descriptive nature of an IPA study captured the reporting of the complexity of political leadership, which is interwoven with leadership strategies, personal skills, and pluralistic communities and unique to each female superintendent.

Research Design

This study explored Kentucky female superintendents' perceptions and practice of political leadership. The study began with the administration of an online questionnaire distributed to all 33 female superintendents serving in Kentucky on March 1, 2015. Four experienced Kentucky female superintendents volunteered to participate in a series of two individual interviews by providing their name and contact information and by

responding to the last question of the online questionnaire. Each volunteer served in a separate service center region. I asked other superintendents to participate in the interviews because they served in service center regions not represented by the volunteer sample. Two additional participants agreed to participate in the interview process.

Superintendents chose a time convenient for their phone interviews. Following each interview, I transcribed word-for-word the audio recording and then listened to the tape while reading the transcription. Each superintendent received her transcribed interview to review and revise for accuracy and understanding. Once the superintendents approved the transcriptions, I began the cyclical process of IPA, described in the section below.

Data Collection

The surveys administered during the AASA decennial study (Kowalski et al., 2011) and the State Action for Education Leadership Policy study of Kentucky superintendents in 2001 (Björk, Keedy, Rinehart, & Winter, 2002) informed development of the questionnaire used in this study. The questionnaire gathered data about female superintendents' work setting, career track, time spent in superintendent roles, communication patterns, and professional networking. Volunteers from the questionnaire administration and purposeful invitation to additional participants created a homogeneous group of experienced superintendents. Homogeneity of sample is a requirement of using IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Two semi-structured interviews with each selected superintendent were then conducted. The open-ended structure of these interviews enabled participants to “define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74), allowing me the flexibility to probe or

seek additional information. I created potential interview questions for each interview (see Appendix C and Appendix D). Because the purpose of the study was to gather experienced female superintendents' perceptions and practices of political leadership, each interview was a free-flowing conversation rather than a structured interview. After each phase of the investigation, I examined the data collected and reviewed the instruments to assure that sufficient and appropriate data were gathered to answer the research questions. The overarching question and sub-questions remained in place. However, interview questions were revised and reordered in the second interview protocol to begin the interview with questions specifically about political leadership.

Participants

On March 1, 2015, when the invitation to complete the online questionnaire was sent, 33 females served as superintendent among the 173 county and independent school districts within Kentucky (Kentucky Association of School Superintendents, 2014). The 33 women invited to participate in this study had navigated the labyrinth of challenges described in the literature to obtain a superintendent position. These women were noteworthy because Kentucky—particularly the eastern half of the commonwealth—has long been a patriarchy (Clark, 1988).

Districts vary in political prowess depending on size and diversity of the community, and student enrollment affects the political nature of the superintendency. Hence, the interview phase of this study sought experienced superintendents, which reduced the number of potential interviewees by approximately half (n=18). Questionnaire respondents volunteered at the end of the survey to participate in the two interviews in Phase 2 of the study. Four experienced Kentucky female superintendents

volunteered at the end of the survey; each represented a separate special education service center region of Kentucky. I then sought additional participants from the remaining 18 experienced female superintendents based on tenure and location of district (i.e., within specific service center regions). Two additional participants accepted the invitation to participate in the interviews.

During the 2014-15 school year, only one African-American female had served as assistant superintendent in the Commonwealth (KDE, 2014a, 2014b, 2014d) but no African-American females served in the superintendent position. Because this study focused only on women who serve in the top administrative position of a school district (i.e., superintendent), the participants were women who identify themselves as White, non-Hispanic. Thus, IPA requirement for a homogeneous sample to diminish extenuating circumstance was achieved.

IPA research depends on rich, detailed personal accounts from participants who experience the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). A research assumption was female superintendents with two or more years of tenure have greater knowledge about and personal experience with political leadership as well as established networks and relationships as political leaders. The Superintendent Compensation Webpage (2014a) provides information concerning years of service for their current contract. Tenure of female superintendents was obtained through public contract start dates, which were compared to current year (i.e., contract beginning in July 2014) and initial tenure information. Superintendents tenured for two years have established networks and relationships as political leaders. Two completed years of service as a criterion for participating in interviews was selected because of the limited pool of female

superintendents with three or more years of experience. Thus, the number of potential interviewees for this dissertation research was reduced to 18 Kentucky female superintendents; the 18 were further reduced to 6 through questionnaire volunteers and recruited participants. IPA studies seeks homogeneous groups in phenomenological studies; thus, participants sought were White female superintendents who have served in that role within Kentucky public school districts for two or more years. However, the six interview participants were completing their fourth year of service or more as superintendent.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected for this research sought to develop a picture of political leadership within the lived-experiences of each participant. Although administration of an online questionnaire was the first phase of this study, the two interviews with six experienced female superintendents served as the primary source for gathering perceptions and practices of female superintendents concerning political leadership. Levels of interview analysis provided both meaning and themes concerning political leadership. Each participant's case was prepared before a cross-case analysis occurs.

Data Collection

Each of the current 33 Kentucky female superintendents received an electronic mail message (see Appendix A) that invited her participation to complete the online questionnaire. The message included an (a) introduction from the researcher, (b) purpose of the research, (c) explanation about why she was invited to participate, (d) statement concerning protection of confidentiality and rights as a participant, and (e) the researcher's contact information. Also included in the initial message was a link to the

online questionnaire. I sent three reminder emails to complete the questionnaire, requesting each superintendent to participate. All data gathered through the online questionnaire was downloaded and saved on the researcher's personal computer. Information remained confidential because the last question (i.e., interviewee recruitment) was deleted prior to data analysis. Additional interview participants were recruited based on their tenure and district location.

Two semi-structured interviews with six superintendents were conducted within a one-month time frame in order to gather each superintendent's perceptions about political leadership in relatively the same time period. Interviews were scheduled via electronic mail message, which provided information about the structure and recording of each interview and about the opportunity for each participant to review her transcript prior to analysis. Field notes, interview observations, and the researcher's bracketed notes complement participant's recorded interviews. Data gathered through the interviews focused on the superintendent's (a) role as a political leader, (b) description of power, (c) activities and behaviors associated with political leadership and power, and (d) preparations for serving as a political leader.

The first semi-structured interview asked questions about the superintendent's journey to the position, relationships that aided in obtaining the superintendent position, establishing networks, and power. The first research sub-question listed below served as the focus of the first interview (see protocol in Appendix C) was, *How do female superintendents foster relationships and use power to influence others?*

The first interview sought information about how experienced Kentucky female superintendents perceived their power and used it to influence others, as well as the activities they associated with power and influence.

The second interview protocol was revised to begin the conversation with questions about political leadership, a change made after analysis of data gathered from the first interview. The second sub-question that guided the second interview (see protocol in Appendix D) was, *What behaviors do female superintendents engage in or implement as political leaders?*

Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The online questionnaire closed on April 20, 2015. Four questionnaire respondents volunteered through email to participate in Phase 2 interviews. The final question containing identifying data was deleted before data analysis began. Because of the small sample size, 13 questionnaire respondents, all data were analyzed by hand and visual tables were created to illustrate the results reported in Chapter 4.

Analysis of Interview Data

IPA often employs a set of common processes and principles prescribed for a flexible analysis of data (Fade, 2004; Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Hatch (2002) perceives “data analysis is a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148); the inductive process allowed me to begin with the meaningful parts of the interview and then gather those pieces into a meaningful whole (Hatch, 2002). Following the IPA process allowed unanticipated topics or themes to emerge during analysis. The displayed strategies in Table 3.1, which are suggested by Smith (2007), provided structure during this research’s iterative and inductive cycle of analysis.

Table 3.1

IPA Analysis Strategies

Strategy	Literature Source
Line by line analysis of experiential claims, concerns and understanding by each participant	(Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006)
The identification of themes or patterns within the participant's experiences emphasizing commonality and nuance in a single case and then across multiple cases	(Eatough & Smith, 2008)
The researcher familiar with the coded data develops a conversation between the data, the researcher and the participant's meaning and concerns to develop a more interpretive account	(Larkin et al. 2006; Smith, 2004)
Development of a frame illustrating relationships between the patterns or themes	(Smith et al., 2009)
Organization of all material in a manner to trace a trail through the entire analysis from the initial comments on the transcript through to the initial clustering and then on to the thematic development and finally to the final structure of the themes	(Smith et al., 2009)
Use of external audit and collaboration to test and develop coherence and plausibility of the theme interpretation	(Smith et al., 2009)
Development of detailed narrative, commentary on data, along with a visual guide to take the reader through the interpretation, theme-by theme	(Smith, 2007)

Step 1: Reading and rereading. In the initial data analysis, I immersed myself in the transcripts and ensured that each interviewee became the focus of my analysis. Reading and listening to the taped interviews assisted me in identifying and

understanding the true essence of her perceptions. Rereading the transcript allowed me to review data for in-depth understanding as well as slow down the process of synopsis to engage actively with the data while looking for richer and more detailed sections, similarities and contradictions (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 2: Initial noting. Exploring the content of commentary and language of the superintendent's words became the focus of the initial phase of note writing that was recorded in conjunction with the written transcript. I identified the specific ways the interviewee perceived and understood the phenomenon (i.e., female superintendent political leadership). I conducted an initial noting on each transcript, a form of free-text analysis that produced a comprehensive detailed set of notes and comments for each transcript. During this phase of the IPA process, I focused on organizing notes in order to trace the analysis process. Similarities and differences along with contradictions or amplifications were noted. My notes were color-coded to ensure descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments were readily identified. Deconstruction of the interview required fracturing the narrative flow of the transcript to reveal relationships and meaning of words. Table 3.2 describes the four steps (Smith et al., 2009).

Step 3: Developing emergent themes. The hermeneutic circle required a second cycle during Step 3. That is, the notes and comments recorded during Step 2 became data for analysis during Step 3, with each comment or note reviewed during this interpretive phase of the analysis. Thus, data from the previous cycle becomes the focus of analyzing into parts from which emergent themes could emerge. Organization of the process and outcome remained paramount to assure I could rewind the circular motion of the data analysis to return to the original voice of the interviewee. During the third step, the

regard for detail diminished as the complexity of relationships, connections, and patterns became static. This phase of analysis included my perceptions and responses to each superintendent’s recall of her lived experiences. Themes, conveyed in phrases and sentences served as the concepts of the research; however, those concepts remained grounded in the superintendents’ voices. Thus, the themes reflect both the superintendent’s words and thoughts, and my interpretations of their understanding of the phenomenon (i.e., political leadership).

Table 3.2

Exploratory Comments of Initial Noting

Comments	Description
Descriptive	Focus lies in describing content found in key words, phrases or explanations from the participant. Things are taken at face value during this phase, while reviewing key objects, events, and lived-experiences of the participant. Care to record descriptions, assumptions, sound bites, figures of speech or emotional responses, and acronyms.
Linguistic	Focus remains on the language used by the participant. Attention is given to pronoun use, pauses, laughter, functional aspects of language, repetition, tone, fluency, and metaphors.
Conceptual	Focus on conceptual level as coding takes an interrogative form. The participant’s overarching understanding begins to emerge and an element of the researcher’s personal reflection set the stage for more interpretive view of the data.
Deconstruction	Focus on reading the data differently to gain a view of interrelationship between experiences.

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes. The themes that emerged from the transcription in Step 3 were mapped or organized to fit similar themes together. Flexibility was key to conducting this step of analysis because the process

requires themes to join to form clusters of related themes or be discarded. Once again patterns and connections emerged in addition to similarities and differences. At the end of Step 4, I recorded notes concerning how this process occurred and then designed a graphic representation of the structure of the emergent themes.

Step 5: Moving to the next case. IPA requires a researcher to commit to reviewing the participant's lived-experience individually so each case is treated on its own terms. To ensure the first case fails to interfere, the researcher must bracket the ideas, which emerged from the previous case as she proceeds with the second case analysis (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, after completing the first superintendent's interviewee transcription, I repeated the same four steps with all remaining interview transcriptions.

Step 6: Looking for pattern across cases. During the final step of analysis, I gathered all graphic representations together to conduct a cross-case analysis to determine common patterns or themes. During the process, themes were renamed or reconfigured and common themes were noted. I prepared a graphic representation of all themes and connections between themes. Analysis of each participant's set of interviews produced a specific case from a unique context. In Chapter 4, the findings outline cross-case themes that emerged from the process in four areas (a) preservice experiences, (b) perceptions of political leadership, (c) behaviors of political leadership, and (d) levels of political leadership.

Quality Check

Qualitative research seeks people's construction of reality and understanding of the world (Merriam, 2009). Because each individual's perceptions about phenomena

differ, no single reality exists in qualitative research; rather multiple socially constructed realities are reported (Creswell, 2007; Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the notion of credibility for qualitative studies requires integrity of data collection and analysis to support the findings of the researcher. Trustworthiness is time- and context-bound, suggesting an idiographic nature. As a relatively new research method, IPA seeks credibility through the process of designing the research study, collecting and analyzing data, and submitting a well-written report (Smith et al., 2009).

Four principles are used to ensure quality of qualitative research: (a) sensitivity to context, (b) commitment and rigor (c) transparency and coherence, and (d) impact and importance (Yardley, 2000). Sensitivity to context ensures the socio-cultural context, current literature, and study participants' data are included. Thoroughness of the research (e.g., sample questions, in-depth interview, care of data analysis) determine the rigor of the study and enhances the transparency of the work (Merriam, 2009). Detailed description of data collection and analysis should include both the phenomenological and hermeneutic side of IPA to assure that reported research brings new light to the phenomenon studied and provides useful information for the reader (Fade, 2004; Merriam, 2009; Yardley, 2000). This research was conducted in an ethical manner and is authentic in reporting female superintendent's perceptions about political leadership to the greatest extent possible.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all qualitative data, generalization cannot occur. This research examined the perceptions and practices of experienced Kentucky female superintendents with regard to political leadership, which narrowed the focus and ability to apply findings to a

greater population than those participating in the study. Gathering data via an online questionnaire and interviews with superintendents working in diverse settings enabled me to explore participants' perceptions across the Commonwealth. The sample of experienced female superintendents in Phase 2 included only six experienced superintendents, representing approximately one-third of the experienced female superintendents as of June 2015.

Role of the Researcher

I worked alone on all aspects of this research, which included developing an online questionnaire, conducting phone interviews, and coding of all six transcripts. To minimize potential researcher bias, I asked the six interviewees to review their transcriptions carefully. I followed the required steps of IPA faithfully and included the female superintendents' words as much as possible to report study findings. One superintendent volunteered to member check a portion of the study report. My intent while conducting this research was to report findings as authentically as possible.

Researcher's Background

I completed a BA in accounting and owned my own business for several years. After completing a MEd in teaching, I taught for six years in Montessori and Kindergarten classrooms in an independent school in Central Kentucky. Upon obtaining my principal certification, I served as a principal in Lexington. I reside in New Orleans, Louisiana and serve as the president of an all-girls Catholic academy that serves students from preschool through 12th grade. My current responsibilities entail working with the academy's board of trustees, handling financial administration and alumnae relations, fundraising, policy making and governance, and assuring achievement of the vision and

mission of the Academy as well as supervising three principals. In many ways, my current position mirrors many of the responsibilities of a superintendent, particularly those serving small county districts and independent districts in Kentucky. The use of open-ended objective questions along with bracketing reflections and tied to previous literature were used to limit potential bias of the researcher.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to understand experienced Kentucky female superintendents' perceptions about political leadership. This study included an online questionnaire administered to all current 33 Kentucky female superintendents followed by a series of two interviews with six experienced Kentucky female superintendents. Using the IPA process, descriptive, linguistic and conceptual analysis of the word-for-word transcriptions took place. The results of this study provide a better understanding of how Kentucky female superintendents perceive and practice political leadership. Chapter 4 outlines the findings from the questionnaire and interviews, setting the stage for conclusions presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the political leadership role of the superintendency as perceived by experienced Kentucky female superintendents. By developing a picture of the female superintendents' political leadership role, common themes concerning how women develop a professional network, influence others, navigate conflict, and address community needs adds to the field of female superintendent research. This study focused on the experiences and perspectives of Kentucky female superintendents gathered through interviews guided by the overarching question, *How do experienced female superintendents perceive political leadership?* Two sub-questions guided exploration of how female superintendents view themselves as political leaders: *How do female superintendents foster relationships and use power to influence others? What behaviors do female superintendents engage in or implement as political leaders?*

The research was completed in two stages—an online questionnaire and individual interviews. In Phase 1, participants responded to demographic questions that sought to create a picture of the current Kentucky female superintendent. The questionnaire includes questions about (a) demographics and current work setting, (b) preservice preparation and experience, (c) roles of the superintendent, (e) communication patterns and (f) professional networking. Phase 2 gathered individual perceptions of political leadership from Kentucky female superintendents with two or more years of experience through phone and face-to-face interviews. These semi-structured interviews produced perceptions of experienced Kentucky female superintendents about (a) preservice preparation, (b) definition of political leadership (c) process of political

leadership, and (d) behaviors of political leadership. Interview data were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an iterative and inductive cycle of data analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Phase 1: Online Questionnaire

During Phase 1, all female superintendents in the Commonwealth of Kentucky were identified through an online search of the Directory of Members and Districts prepared by the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents (2014). From the directory female superintendent electronic mail addresses were obtained for all currently serving female superintendents.

Questionnaire Sample

On March 16, 2015, I sent electronic mail messages to all 33 female superintendents in Kentucky inviting them to participate in the study by responding to the online questionnaire (see Appendix A). The online questionnaire was opened on March 16, 2015 and closed on April 20, 2015. During that time period, I sent three reminders to complete the questionnaire. Invitations and reminders were individually emailed to superintendents to avoid potential delivery issues. All questionnaire information was gathered and maintained on a secure Web server managed by SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) for which I had a private account. Among those 33 female superintendents invited to participate, 13 (39%) of all female superintendents completed the questionnaire. With regards to survey response rates, Cycyota and Harrison (2006) found through a meta-analysis of response rates for 231 executive surveys that mean response rate to be 32% in 2003, which indicated a decline over the previous decade. They also found a much lower response rate among executives than other populations

when surveyed. Because superintendents are classified as executives, the response rate for the online questionnaire (39%) is acceptable. Data gathered through the online questionnaire were analyzed by hand due to question types and response numbers.

Female Demographics

All participating females identified themselves as White, non-Hispanic, from 7 of the 9 special education service areas in the state. Among the 13 respondents, 6 were over 50, 5 ranged in age from 46-50 and 2 reported their age as 41-45. Half of the female superintendents 50% (n=5) earned a masters (MA, MS, MEd) as their highest degree, while 30% (n=3) completed a specialist in education degree (EdS), 30% (n=3) completed a Rank I and 20% (n=2) earned a doctorate (EdD, PhD). Those completing the questionnaire served in seven of the nine special education regions shown in Figure 4.1. Two regions, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) with only one female superintendent, and Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative (KVEC), with two female superintendents, had no responses. Four female superintendents serve in the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC) of which three responded to the questionnaire, thus GRREC had the highest response rate.

A majority of female superintendents served in one district for at least a decade (Table 4.1) demonstrating limited mobility outside their district before becoming superintendent. Seven respondents possessed four or more years of experience as a superintendent; three other female superintendents served for 2-3 years and three new superintendents responded to the questionnaire (see Table 4.1). Only half of the 33 Kentucky female superintendents—18—possessed two or more years of experience at the time of the questionnaire, therefore 44% of questionnaire respondents were experienced superintendents.

Table 4.1

Years Worked in Current District as P12 Educator and Superintendent

Number of Years	Current District as a P12 Educator	Current District as Superintendent
1 year	1	3
2-3 years	1	3
4-5 years	0	2
6-10 years	1	5
10 or more	10	
Total	13	13

Although nine superintendents (69%) reported having served in a district outside of their current district as a P12 educator, none of the questionnaire respondents had been employed in a district outside of the Commonwealth. Eleven (85%) of respondents had served as superintendent in one district, while the other two (15%) were superintendents in another district before assuming their current position. Among the superintendents who responded to the questionnaire, eight served in predominately rural districts, three in remote rural districts, one in a small city district, and one in a midsize urban district.

Preservice Preparation and Experience

Most Kentucky female superintendents, who responded to the online questionnaire, had experience as a P12 classroom teacher. Four superintendents worked in the classroom for 0-5 years, five were in the classroom for 6-10 years and four spent 11-15 years as a teacher (see Table 4.2). District offices served as the most common preservice administrative experience among female superintendents: somewhat surprising was that approximately half of the female superintendents never served as an assistant principal or principal before assuming the superintendency (See Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Years as a Full-Time P12 Teacher and Assistant Principal and Principal

Years	P12 Teacher	Assistant Principal and Principal
0-5	4	4
6-10	5	3
11-15	4	0
16-20	0	0
More than 20	0	0
Never served in position	0	6
Total	13	13

The district office proved to be the most common pathway for those serving as superintendent (see Table 4.3). Those serving as building administrators served predominately at the elementary level (see Table 4.4). Female superintendents with prior service as a principal all served in rural districts, with eight in districts located approximately 25 miles from an urban center and five located in a remote rural district, located more than 100 miles from an urban center. All but one respondent held a district position prior to becoming superintendent (see Table 4.5). Half of all female

superintendents were employed as an associate superintendent before becoming superintendent.

Table 4.3

Pathways to the Superintendency for Kentucky Female Superintendents

Pathways	Experience
Never served as a P12 educator	0
Preschool teacher	0
Elementary teacher	8
Middle school teacher	4
High school teacher	2
Assistant principal elementary	0
Assistant principal middle	2
Assistant principal high	0
Principal elementary	4
Principal middle	2
Principal high	1
District-level position (e.g. director, supervisor)	10
Assistant or associate superintendent	8

* Total equals more than number of questionnaire respondents

Table 4.4

School Served as Principal the Longest

	Superintendents
Elementary	4
Middle/Junior High	2
High	1
Never served as principal	6
Total	13

Table 4.5

Position Immediately Prior to the Superintendency

Position	Responses
Assistant superintendent	6
Deputy superintendent	2
Director of curriculum and instruction	1
Finance officer/network administrator	1
Supervisor	1
Principal of a P-8 grade building	1

One participant skipped this question.

Roles of the Superintendency

Several prompts on the online questionnaire asked female superintendents about the five distinct roles of the superintendent literature: (a) *instructional leader* (i.e., curriculum and instruction); (b) *manager* (i.e., general management, finance, human resources and operations); (c) *political leader* (i.e., allocation of resources, board and community relations); (d) *communicator* (i.e., listening, sharing information through multiple venues); and (e) *applied social scientist* (i.e., solving educational or social problems). For example, Question 24 asked respondents to rank in order these five roles in order of importance with 1=least important and 5=most important. Based on their previous work experience, it was not surprising that these female superintendents rated *instructional leader* as the most important. The remaining roles were ranked communicator (second), manager (third), political leader (fourth) and applied social scientist (fifth).

Question 25 asked the female superintendents how often they performed each of the superintendent roles where the response options included *daily, 2 or 3 times per week, weekly, biweekly, or monthly*. Among 13 superintendents, most who serve in rural or small districts, their daily work encompasses the roles of communicator, manager, and

instructional leader. They act as political leader on a weekly or biweekly basis.

Interestingly, the greatest variance among responses was how often they acted as an applied social scientist, which spanned across the options (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Superintendent Roles Performance Frequency

Roles	Category Responses				
	Daily	2 to 3 times a week	Weekly	Biweekly	Monthly
Communicator	12	0	0	0	1
Manager	11	1	1	0	0
Instructional leader	8	4	1	0	0
Political leader	2	5	3	3	0
Applied social scientist	3	3	3	2	2

Question 26 then asked respondents to complete the sentence, *I believe I am a strong...* with each of the five superintendent roles and then rate the accuracy of the statement. The rating scale included *strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree*. All female superintendents showed confidence in their roles as instructional leader, manager, and communicator by selecting agree or strongly agree. They indicated that they were least confident in their role as political leader. Political leadership proved to be the area of least experience prior to the superintendency found in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

Role Experience Prior to Superintendency

Roles	Category Responses				
	Little to no experience	Minimal experience	Some experience	Many experiences	Served in role prior to superintendency
Instructional leader	1	0	0	2	9
Manager	0	0	1	6	6
Political	3	0	4	4	2
Communicator	0	1	1	2	9
Applied social scientist	0	1	5	4	3

* Only 12 respondents commented on Instructional Leader

Question 28 on the online questionnaire was an open-ended prompt that asked, *During your first year as superintendent, which of the five leadership roles was the most challenging? Why?* Eleven of the 13 (85%) female superintendents responded that political leadership was the most challenging role in their first year as superintendent.

Below is one of the longest responses to that question:

I dislike politics and, while I understand that we need to have good relationships with legislators, [I] dislike that they may think they can “control” you if they have a good working relationship with you. Remember the old adage, “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.” In my early experiences with a legislator, there was an expectation of something in return for “helping” the district even though that should be a top priority for any legislator, without the consideration for “favours.” I hate politics and especially hate what politics does to a school district. What is right should be done regardless of who gets the credit and without the expectation of “payback” in any way other than the payback of preparing kids for their future.

According to this superintendent, political leadership is often attached to completing favours for others. She viewed politics as exchange of favours at the state level. Political

favors, doing something for something in return, brings a negative perception to the discussion of political leadership.

Another response emphasizes the lack of preparation for the role and the negative impact of politics on district progress.

Lack of experiential background meant I had to learn “on the job.” The unexpected nature of many of the political challenges involved in making decisions that were the right things for students versus doing what adults want, impacted the support given to decisions after they were made. The political aspects of this have accumulated over time. It has impeded the improvement process.

Superintendents must communicate and work with the board in making decisions. Board development, board continuing education and board education about finances takes time and is the superintendent’s responsibility as a political leader. For another female superintendent, these tasks include “developing and leading the board toward important decisions in timely manner” and “managing finances [during times of] declining state and federal budgets.”

For another female superintendent, political leadership requires understanding the community and who holds power made politics difficult for this female superintendent in the beginning. She also stumbled her first year as a district leader by “not knowing [or] understanding where the power structures were in the community.” Interestingly, all her experience prior to moving into the district office was elementary education.

Another female superintendent defined political leadership somewhat differently. Because she views it as time committed to networking with external leaders, it did not hold the same priority for her as attending to students and employees in her district.

Finding time to network (verbally and physically) with legislators, business leaders and policy makers was and continues to be difficult. I am about growing individual shareholders (adults and children) and this growth mindset places political events and “social connections” second [on my priority list]. Time to do extras, while important, is a barrier.

Female superintendents who expressed a focus on student needs viewed political leadership as producing a negative impact on students and school districts due to political favors.

The comments to this open-ended question evidences a shared prospective that being a political leader means assessing quickly who composes the community and identifying who holds “the power.” All comments presented above were written by superintendents who had at least three years of experience serving as superintendent in their current district.

Communication Patterns

In their responses to any earlier prompt on the online questionnaire, the female superintendent reported they communicated well, activating this role each day. Because the communication role is critical for superintendents, Question 29 on the questionnaire asked respondents to rate how often they communicated with key stakeholders according to the scale *daily*, *2 or 3 times a week*, *weekly*, *biweekly*, or *monthly*. Table 4.8 displays the frequency of their responses.

Twelve of the 13 respondents indicated they communicate daily with district staff, while 60% reported communicating *daily* or *2 or 3 times a week* with principals, their school board chair, and school board members. Communication with other superintendents, community leaders and member of interest groups occurred much less often, on a *biweekly* or *monthly* basis. Interestingly, among the 13 female

superintendents, 5 reported communicating with students and parents *daily* or *2 to 3 times weekly*, whereas the group's reported communication with teachers is distributed across a range from *2 to 3 times a week* to *biweekly*.

Table 4.8

Communication

Group	Category Responses				
	Daily	2 or 3 times a week	Weekly	Biweekly	Monthly
District staff	12	0	1	0	0
Principals	4	8	1	0	0
School board chair	3	7	2	0	1
Students	3	3	2	2	1
Parents	2	2	4	2	3
School board members	0	6	6	1	0
Teachers	0	3	5	2	3
Superintendents	0	2	2	3	6
Interest groups	0	1	4	5	2
Community leaders	0	1	3	7	1

Professional Networking

Female superintendents reported having a strong professional network as well as mentors who prepared them for the superintendency (see Table 4.9). Mentors provided the most support for enacting roles as an instructional leader and a manager. When reporting their role preparation and support from mentors, female superintendents indicated that mentors supported their development in the instructional and managerial role. However, they received the least support for developing their political leadership

and for acting as an applied social scientist. In their daily role as communicator, female superintendents did not receive experience or support in an overwhelming degree. In the forthcoming section about findings from interviewees, female superintendents assert that communication is key to establishing relationships, which is the foundation of female superintendent political leadership.

Table 4.9

Networking

Survey Statements	Category Responses				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I have a strong network.	0	0	2	5	6
I have mentor(s) who prepared me for the superintendency.	0	1	1	9	2
I have mentor(s) I call upon as superintendent.	0	1	2	7	3
I have a strong support system who encouraged me to seek leadership positions.	0	0	3	4	6
I call other superintendent(s) when needed.	0	0	0	6	7

Table 4.10

Mentors Support in Superintendent Roles

Role	Category Responses				
	Never	Very little	Some	Many	Already experienced
Instructional leader	1	1	3	3	5
Manager	0	1	3	6	3
Political leader	1	2	6	2	2
Communicator	1	2	5	2	3
Applied social scientist	1	1	7	1	3

Phase 2: Interviews

During Phase 2, six experienced Kentucky female superintendents participated in two interviews. Five completed both interviews via the phone. The sixth participated in

one phone and one face-to-face interview at her request. The six interview participants reside in different service center regions and serve in a variety of district sizes ranging from small to large. A small district for this study is under 2,999 students, a mid-size district has student enrollment of 3,000 to 7,999 students and a large district has student enrollment over 8,000 students. The two semi-structured interview sessions included scripted and non-scripted questions (see interview protocol in Appendix C and D).

Participants

Each superintendent was assigned a pseudonym for anonymity (see Table 4.11). The following vignettes provide greater in-depth understanding of each superintendent's background and demographics of district. However, the researcher has taken care to keep anonymous the identity of each participant which proves difficult with the small number of experienced female superintendents. Therefore, district population and service centers are not included.

May. May began her career as a secondary mathematics teacher in a rural district and moved into the district office as technology director; she never worked as a school administrator. May has served in two districts as superintendent and as a director in a third district. Her current homogeneous district serves a small population within an urban area with great involvement from the community, and thus, she works with local leaders who often visit the schools. She describes her mentors as two males—one a relative—that encouraged her to seek the superintendency. May grew up in a family of P12 educators with both parents working for the rural district she served during her first superintendency. She served as superintendent for a total of 9 years in two districts as of June 1, 2015 and has been involved in state superintendent organizations in the past.

Table 4.11

District Size and Tenure of Participants

Pseudonym	Kentucky District Size and Tenure
May	Small district, 9 years of experience in two districts
March	Mid-size district, 5 years of experience
August	Mid-size district, 4 years of experience
Jan	Large district, 9 years of experience
June	Large district, 4 years of experience
April	Large district, 4 years of experience

March. March lived most of her life in the district where she is currently serving as superintendent. Prior to assuming the position, she worked in the district office for ten years and as an elementary school teacher. March applied for the superintendency when serving as assistant superintendent but was not chosen. When the two-year tenured superintendent retired early, March was asked to serve as the interim superintendent. After serving as interim for six months and receiving encouragement from others, she decided to apply for the superintendency again and obtained the position. March described the elementary schools in her rural area as the “center” of the small communities within her district. Along with the school system, the communities’ cohesiveness came from very active churches. At the time of the interview, March had four years as superintendent.

August. August served as a secondary mathematics teacher as well as both a middle school and high school principal. While serving as an assistant superintendent

she moved into the superintendency as an internal candidate. Somewhat surprising, August shared she never aspired to become a superintendent. Because her community has a transient population at times, its residents did not demonstrate a strong interest in the school system. During the time she participated in the interview, she was working to collaborate with a local university and also a local independent school district because residents within her district were strongly intertwined with each other as “everyone knows someone.” August had served the district for four years as superintendent at the time of her interview.

Jan. With the longest tenure in one district among interview participants, Jan served as an elementary teacher, a district coordinator, an assistant superintendent, and interim superintendent. Jan decided to apply for the superintendency after she had served as interim superintendent with success, although she never thought she would serve as superintendent during her career. Jan served a diverse district: movement of families into and out of the area is commonplace. The diversity of the area changes from each community in the district from north to south; from the northern area made up of many transient single-parent families to the southern rural part of the district made up of families of “generational poverty” with an Amish population. Jan initiated several “collaborative partnerships” with community and business leaders and elected officials, and she also works with the independent district within the county. Jan has been very active in state level training and politics for education. She just completed nine years of service as superintendent at the time of the interview.

June. June started her career outside of an educational setting: she moved into education as a special education teacher and then served as a kindergarten/first grade

teacher. During her career as an educator, she worked as the due process coordinator, special education coordinator, and alternative process coordinator for an independent district. Because of politics and turnover in superintendents, June transferred to another district to serve as special education coordinator. Her job responsibilities grew over the years as she supervised elementary and secondary education programs and federal programs. During her superintendent's extended illness, she served in his absence as superintendent, and later assumed the superintendency. Her district includes both rural and urban areas. She collaborates with independent school districts located within her district boundaries. She completed her fourth year as superintendent when she was interviewed.

April. Prior to her four year tenure as superintendent in a large district, April was a teacher, assistant principal, principal of a high school, and "area" superintendent. She was then appointed as an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction and the chief academic officer. When her superintendent was suspended, she was appointed as interim superintendent. She decided to apply for the superintendency in another district where she had never lived or worked. During her interviews, April explained that her mobility and lack of ties to the community were an advantage because she had freedom to make decisions without repercussions to family ties. She regularly collaborates with local universities, elected leaders and the mayor; she also serves on several state advisory boards. April's district, in a pluralistic urban area, served the most diverse population. At the time of the interview April had completed her fourth year of service in the district.

Data Collection and Analysis

The 12 interviews were conducted between June 1, 2015 and July 2, 2015, each interview lasted approximately an hour. All interviews were audio recorded, and I sent each superintendent a copy of the transcription for both interviews. I asked them to review their comments carefully and allowed them to clarify, revise or omit comments that contained confidential or misleading information. Once I received all reviewed transcriptions, I began analyzing them using the IPA steps described in Chapter 3.

Four major areas emerged during the iterative review of interviews: (a) preservice experiences, (b) self-perceptions of political leadership, (c) behaviors of political leadership and (d) levels of political leadership. Although their recollections about preservice experiences changed over time as superintendents served longer tenures, three things were common within what they considered preservice preparation—coursework, experience, and mentors. Although they perceived themselves to be political leaders, their conceptions of political leadership differed. Their descriptions of behaviors by political leaders included (a) establishing a common vision, (b) initiating and building relationships, (c) communicating and listening, (d) using referent power and influence effectively, (e) making wise decisions, and (f) evidencing trust and transparency.

Preservice Preparation for Political Leadership

Prior experiences and appropriate education influences success as one enters a new position. Understanding the interactions of coursework preparation, preservice experiences, and mentors, prepares female superintendents for their new responsibilities and provides information for future superintendency preparation. Female superintendents

in this study took various paths to assume the non-traditional role of a female serving in the district's highest position.

Coursework

The female superintendents that were interviewed felt no course training could prepare a candidate well for entering the superintendency. A common response was that the only required preparation in coursework for political leadership entailed writing about the role. One superintendent recommended inclusion of more scenarios during coursework to provide opportunities for aspiring superintendents in assessing situations.

Female Preservice Experiences

The various pathways taken by the superintendents included long tenures of educational experience as well as time working in district-office positions. Two of the six interviewed superintendents served as secondary mathematics teachers and spoke about the anomaly of a female in this role. Two women also served as a high school principal and reported that they thought the high school principalship as the best preparation for the superintendency. Interestingly, none of the other four female superintendents served as building-level administrators (e.g., principal, assistant, principal).

Long tenure in the district office was the common pathway for all six superintendents. Four interviewees served as associate superintendents prior to moving to the superintendency with two serving as directors of specific district programs. Although four of the six participants were employed in other districts during their career, four were internal candidates serving in the district where they obtained the superintendent position. Three interviewees served as interim superintendent before becoming superintendent, and

a fourth acted as superintendent due to illness of her district leader. For two, the interim experience encouraged them to seek the superintendency. According to one superintendent, “serving as interim enabled me to see I was effective in the role...[it] gave me confidence.”

Mentors

Encouragement appears many times in the superintendents’ reflections about their career path. Four superintendents reported others encouraging them to apply for the superintendent position, while five of the six spoke of encouragement from others to move into administrative positions throughout their career. Female superintendents found the strongest support from informal mentors who they encountered throughout their career. Three confided in female colleagues, not themselves superintendents, who provided a sounding board for issues. However, when asked about mentors for political leadership, all six responded their political mentors were men.

During the interview phase, the superintendents were asked if they agreed with the questionnaire open response results that 85% of questionnaire respondents perceived political leadership was the most challenging role their first year as superintendent. All six superintendents agreed that political leadership was the most challenging role for them. During the second interview, they were asked, *Looking back on your first year as superintendent, were you prepared for the aspects of political leadership?* Their answers revealed more information about their individual preparation in addition to some perceptions of political leadership.

June: No, no, no, I was not. I knew I wasn’t. I would never compromise my values, my ethics. I knew I was never going down that road but what I didn’t realize was how politics had impacted the performance in the district.

When asked how female superintendents might be more prepared for political leadership, most interviewees paused and reflected for a moment before responding. Three superintendents suggested the addition of more female superintendents would change the preparation for the political leadership role.

June: Have more females in the position to follow [laughter]. I don't know if we're [females] naïve but I think having maybe female mentors who explain the process and reassuring [us that we] don't have to compromise [our] values. I won't stay in this position if I have to [compromise] my values. I've had male mentors say to me, "You're going to have to play politics in that job." I'm not doing it. I'm aware of the politics, but I'm not going to get in the dirt with them.

As I listened to June, I hear an implied desire for female mentors who possess her values to serve as role models. She also alluded to the negative side of politics that requires compromising values. The lack of female superintendents to provide mentoring comes up from other interviewees.

August: I went to the new superintendent training provided [by KASA]. Even though they had females, the stronger presence came from the male superintendents.

Jan: [Political leadership preparation] is unique to female superintendents. It is getting better as far as having more female superintendents but [the superintendency] is not viewed as a female profession especially in a larger district.

Female superintendents perceived the small number of female superintendents influences the success of women in the political-leadership arena. While new superintendent training includes women, the program does not support the role of political leadership by females. August put it in terms of experience, "I think in some cases, you have to learn by fire."

Interviewees served in district office positions related to finance, technology, early childhood, and special education and some served as deputy and associate superintendent. Having high school principal experience emerged as the best training ground for political leadership.

April: I put myself in the category of more prepared because the nature of a high school principal is very political.

August: The best preparation I got was being a high school principal. I was a middle school principal, but it was not nearly as involved [in politics]. But as a high school principal, you have a lot of different constituents that you have to consider and work with. I think my experience as a high school principal really helped me more than anything else.

August went on to share that she felt the superintendent often protects building level administrators from politics, “We were insulated from it.” She believed if an assistant superintendent aspired to acquire the superintendency, the superintendent should involve them in building relationships, meeting various constituencies, as well as developing an understanding of maneuvering within the political climate. Like two other superintendents, August did not aspire to be a superintendent. If she had envisioned herself seeking the superintendency, she thought she might have sought more preparation and experiences in the political role. Networking and serving in senior leadership roles helps to develop political leadership experiences for women who assume the superintendency.

Political Leadership

Defining political leadership proved to be difficult because the female superintendents who participated in interviews often paused and thought before answering. While all six women viewed political leadership as necessary, each possessed

her own scale of comfort regarding how she engaged in political leadership. April commented:

If we wanted to be politicians, we would run for office. So I wouldn't say that [we] go into the superintendency because [we] like politics. [We] learn to do that [politics] and see it through that lens because [we] have to do so. It is not any one of our natural tendencies.

Female superintendents viewed politics as something they must do but rarely shared any affinity toward discussing the concept.

Definition

During the second interview, female superintendents were asked, *How would you define the role of political leadership as a superintendent?* Following are four responses that show differences in perceptions.

April: I consider it to be a lens that you have to look through . . . how does this decision impact other people.

June: It is looking at [decisions] in advance and trying to figure out how do [I] build the support for something that maybe uncomfortable for somebody because it requires change.

August: A constant interaction with the different constituents . . . varies based on the needs and what [I am] trying to accomplish. . . . [If] you are trying to convince people that what you are doing is the best thing to do, you gather input. It is a back and forth type of thing, . . . constant interaction with your different constituents.

May: Political leadership is proactively developing relationships to move for a positive change for the school, community, state, nation, to work together toward that.

As the comments above show, the female superintendents viewed political leadership as interacting with others about present or future decisions, and how to lead change. April's view that it is a lens one looks through that suggests political leaders are proactive in

looking at the ramifications of their decisions for others. May, however, places levels of influence within her definition.

March responded somewhat differently by adding the words “pressure from other groups.” Her definition of political leadership includes how the superintendent makes and maintains decisions based on influence from various constituents. While defining political leadership, she also included descriptive words for the process, such as “complicated” and “ever-changing.”

March: It’s being aware of all the external and internal pressure that come to every decision that you have to make. That’s what politics is, it is pressure from different groups or individuals and [whether or not] you yield to that pressure.

Similarly, Jan views the role of political leadership through the lens of decision making but also serving as an advocate for education and children. The most experienced superintendent with a 9-year tenure added advocacy as part of political leadership, which was somewhat unique among the responses to the question posed.

Jan: I would define the role as being a public advocate for education, especially, your school district and most particularly, what is in the best interest of the children in our community.

Somewhat surprising, the female superintendents framed the definition of political leadership in terms of a view of the future, a proactive view of future outcomes, especially how others are affected.

June: You have to kind of anticipate, look ahead, and know whatever decision you make, there are going to be some people unhappy and [consider] how you then address that without it blowing up.

While interviewees acknowledged the importance of the political leadership role, one superintendent shared how easily it can be pushed aside: “It’s an important role, and it’s

something that I think often gets pushed back sometimes” while you are dealing with other issues.

Political Leadership of Superintendent

All six female superintendents were asked simply, *Do you believe you are a political leader?* The framing of their answer once again revealed their perceptions of political leadership.

June: I think I have to be [a political leader], and it is not a part of the job that I like. I do not get deeply involved in a lot of politics of the position, but I don't think that you can be successful in this role if you don't. If you are not aware that it's a requirement to some extent. . . . I try to do that without compromising my values.

Jan: Now, I am. I have learned to be a political leader. . . . I am not fond of playing the “quote” political game, because I infer that sometimes [it] comes with doing favors for others. I'm not that kind of person. I don't believe in that. I felt like it would cause me to not be true to who I am. . . [by being political] in nature. . . . By seeing the role as more public advocacy, it helped me accept the role of political leader because I'm doing it in the name of children.

August: Oh absolutely! You are a political leader in dealing with your board. That's a political relationship.

Female superintendents were challenged by the role of political leadership when they initially assumed the position. However, as each understood the need for the superintendent to act as a political leader, they grew into the role. All six females defined their political leadership in terms that embraced the best interest of children and required integrity. Once they operated within their definition of political leadership they expressed some comfort with the role. August viewed school-based management councils for each school as a political relationship for superintendents.

You have to show them as well as [gather] their input on what direction we really need to go. [We work] as a collective group to determine,

“What do we need to do?” [The political process] slows the process as [while working] to get “buy in.”

According to the interviews, political leadership is a process that takes time to enact and requires building support from others.

April took a long time in responding to the questions. She described the balancing act required for serving in a non-elected position while working with an elected board. Her answer demonstrates the effect of constituents when serving in the political role of superintendent.

April: When I go places, I am introduced like an elected official. My fate rests with an elected board. And so in that sense, I’m elected by the seven members who are responsive to a constituency. So my role is a very political role.

But I am not a politician. My goal is not to be elected or to get re-hired. But [I] can’t really do the work [I] need to do [without] lots of years to turn around a system. If [I] am foolhardy, [I] don’t get the time that [I] need to move the district forward.

So in that sense you are a politician because you have to satisfy different constituents or at least be open and transparent. [It doesn’t mean you will] make decisions that are not best for kids. I would be foolhardy, to anger people that can be allies as we move forward.

While not an elected position in Kentucky, the superintendency is influenced by an elected board. To accomplish change, a superintendent must have time and support from the elected board, who in turn must listen to their constituents in order to be reelected. For superintendents, the political leadership role includes satisfying voters and providing transparency during decision making while simultaneously developing allies and supporters.

When asked if she was a political leader, March replied with the question, “How do you define political leader?” While she never answered “yes” to the interview

question, her answer provided aspects of political leadership that involve decision making, pressure, agendas, and leadership.

I think I've been strong enough to choose the path, my path to focus on the students and to support the schools or students rather than political groups that have a personal agenda. In that way I have been a leader, [because] I don't cave to political pressure.

Responses to the interview question, *Are you a political leader?*, included perceptions about the negative side of politics—political favors. When answering the question, these six female superintendents always included a response of what they would not do as a political leader before they answered if they were a political leader.

Perception Changes with Experience

With four or more years of experience, each participant reflected on changes in their perceptions of political leadership from their first year of service. These changes in perceptions focused on individual perceptions as well as regional and state level politics. One superintendent shared her changes from preservice perceptions. Laughing while responding, June stated,

I probably didn't even think about how much you really were involved in it. . . . I don't think you really realize, how many different groups there are. It's kind of like a juggling act, keeping all the balls in the air at the same time.

March shared, "I didn't even know what it meant when I became a superintendent, I really didn't feel political pressure at first." She believed constituents tended to "back off" and let her lead focusing on what was best for students. When decisions were made, the "influence" appeared from the board, external community groups and parents.

Those with a longer tenure in office recalled changes in perceptions about regional and state politics. Through their comments, the female superintendents spoke about the need to operate outside the district as political leaders. June shared her view on regional politics:

I think it is worse than what I thought. What I'm disappointed in is how some decisions are made for political reasons. . . . I guess my eyes are more aware [that] this happens. A new program comes along, and if it's a friend of a friend . . . I am aware of it more. I am disgusted by it more, but I must stay engaged to protect my own interests and the interests of my district.

As districts joined together in co-ops for services, the "politics" of other superintendents influenced decisions and partnerships. Each superintendent realized that she represents her district's interest in these circumstances.

May asserted that her perception of political leadership changed over time: "My view of the role of the superintendent in the area [political leadership] has broadened." The lens through which she views political leadership is on the state-level in most of her responses. She perceived political leadership involves superintendents sharing a common agenda and developing consensus. If consensus did not occur, she observed that agendas splinter and nothing gets accomplished. May views the Kentucky School Board Association, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents, and Kentucky Association of School Administrators as vehicles for developing common political agendas. "It's important for that effort to be organized . . . [to involve] superintendents from across the state that may not think of themselves as state political leaders." Her common view of engaging with state organizations hinged on the need to "gain impact at the state level" because of "the gravity of tenure for many superintendents." May explained the turnover in the superintendency, what she called "the loss of experience," lessened

superintendents' political impact. Political leadership "really takes someone feeling the responsibility and making the effort. [These] are two of the key ingredients."

April's changes in perception about the superintendency and political leadership were explained in terms of a "matador" that could be "gored" any day, a metaphor she read in a book. She perceived that "many issues are political issues [that] could ignite the community." She discussed the danger of being able to remain in one's positions when making decisions.

So do I know the dangers of the superintendency? Absolutely [with emphasis] because it is political. . . I will not do things that don't fit within a moral compass. So am I like Machiavelli, "the end justifies the means?" Absolutely not! I put my head down at night. . . I have a limit. I'm going to do the right things for my constituents. So in the end [political leadership] is dangerous work.

April's comments evidenced the underlying perception of politics as a balance of right and wrong decisions. Her comments show the continuous process of needing to balance one's values in decision making with potential ramifications to constituencies that may impact the length of tenure as superintendent in the district.

Each superintendent revealed in her response to this interview question that politics in the sense of favors is morally wrong. Concerns about political favors were evident in each answer during the superintendents' interviews. Female superintendents stated their moral compass was "what is best for children" in making decisions. Favors were not an accepted behavior for the female superintendency, but each possessed the knowledge and understanding politics played a role in working within district, regional, and state education. According to June, "Even though you may be playing fairly, you've got to [see] that people [you are fair with] are not always playing fair." Political leadership involved moral decision making for these female superintendents. March

shared a self-evaluation of her performance as political leader: “I don’t think I’ve been successful in all of my dealing with it.” She stated she makes decisions “for the sake of principle of the matter” and was less “likely to negotiate for the sake of politics.”

Examples of Political Leadership

Each superintendent was asked to give an example of her political leadership. All responses included her acting as a change agent. The following vignettes present how four female superintendents enacted political leadership.

Creating new program. June described the process of closing schools—changing the programs to STEAM program and a career center as her example of political leadership. When the district’s new career center was created, she required current personnel to go through a rehiring process for the new program; many former employees were not hired for the new program. The implementation of new curriculum required support from each of the high school’s administrative team to achieve success. While establishing the new STEAM program, she combined two schools into a K-8 facility, which meant closing both schools and reopening them as one school the following year with a new focus on student population and leadership. When June shared the district’s plan for a STEAM K-8 program with the state commissioner of education, he told her that she should take a vacation and leave town as soon as she announced the change implying she needed to avoid the initial conflict. June learned through this experience that she had to be prepared with board support and answers for personnel before the announcement was made.

You’ve got to have a lot of answers, and you’ve got to have a lot of people around you [for] support. You definitely have to pick the right leader because in both situations, I had to have the right leader to carry it out. If

you make the wrong decision, then you're sunk. People won't trust you again or follow you.

June did not take a vacation after the announcement of the STEAM K-8 building. She perceived the commissioner's statement reflected difference between how men and women lead politically.

Working through partnerships. As superintendent, Jan invited local legislators, the mayor, the county judge, the independent school district superintendent and board members in the country, along with elected county official to meet with her board members to discuss enacting educational legislation. Her board members requested that Jan initiate the meeting to share and discuss the financial implications and time constraints required to implement new legislation. During the meeting, the board members and superintendent explained potential ramifications of proposed bills and asked legislators to include the board and superintendent in the discussion of potential bills before they become laws.

She believed she served as an advocate on the local level through seeking “in-kind support” through using “the power of partnerships”—collaborative partnerships with local political leaders and business leaders. Creating a new college and career center required a community partnership to be successful. Jan sat on the community's industrial board in order to participate in economic-development discussions and to hear the needs of local business and industry. She used those community connections to build support. The entire group traveled by bus across Kentucky to visit an established career center. After the trip, she listened to group members' ideas for the district's new center. Before construction began she sought their feedback on the construction plans and proposed

programs. In the end, many of the community businesses provided financial support and resources for the center that now produces trained employees for the workplace.

Negotiating employee salary increases. August felt her political leadership was evident in educating the board members about finances and budgets. As an advocate for higher employee salaries, she showed salary differences with adjacent counties that often hired teachers from her own county. She helped board members to think strategically about finances and worked to unite them as they focused on a strategic plan that included increases in employees' salaries.

Advocating for new school. May described the years she advocated for the funds in Frankfort to build a new school. She invited legislators and state officials to tour the school in her district needing repair or replacement. She testified before the committee to seek funding in addition to reaching out via phone calls to various groups for their support. Her outreach efforts eventually produced funds to build a new school. She described political leadership in this situation as,

“just chipping away, a little piece at a time. I don't think I had a grand plan. It was just talking with local legislator, forming relationships. As their leadership in Frankfort grew, that opened doors for me as well, by then my relationship with the leadership in Frankfort broadened.”

Levels of Political Leadership

The six superintendents split focus between local and state level when discussing political leadership. One superintendent shared her levels of political leadership.

May: Political leadership entails a few strands, one is local and that is proactively developing relationships with local political leaders, in order to work together toward improvement in the school and community. Then [on the] state level to impact state legislation and then of course on the federal level which is more difficult to impact.

May also put political leadership in terms of tenure, suggesting that it takes three years to focus on the role of political leadership, especially on a state level. When asked why other study participants may not have discussed political leadership at the state level, she said:

Maybe it has to do with the number of years they have [worked] as a superintendent. I think the longer you're in the position, the more inclined you are to be focused on the state level as well.

In year one, you're focused so much on your own district because you're learning. . . learning your families, your students, your local policies, [and] your traditions. Year one takes more time. You focus on a good transition into the new position. . . . [During your first year of service] in Kentucky, you have 20 days of new superintendent training, [thus] in addition to focusing on your local district, you are out of the district [a great deal]. You can't afford to be out for anything else, so there's just not time [to work at the state level].

Year two, you've done everything once. You've seen the policies [and] contracts and so you have more time [for political leadership]. Year two, you've been able [to participate in your state organizations], but you are [still] just learning. That's really your first real introduction to be able to get involved. [By] year three, you have a better understanding [of political leadership].

Jan's view of political leadership included a state advocacy for children, and aligned with May's comments above. Both superintendents talked about state laws and legislators as they discussed district relationships. Whether serving in large or small districts, their common ground lay in their years of experience as a superintendent: Jan and May had the longest tenures as superintendent among the women interviewed. Both also served in state organizations.

Behaviors of Superintendent Political Leaders

As superintendents talked about political leadership, they asserted that relationships served as a key to their success. Each spoke of external relationships with

legislators, community leaders, community groups, and the school board, as well as internal relationships with district office personnel and school administrators. Although all commented on the need for relationships, their length of service and size of district changed the nature of how relationships were formed and who had regular communication with the superintendent. Smaller communities provided many more informal avenues for superintendent interaction with the community. In larger districts, more relationships were initiated by the superintendent in formal settings or during scheduled meetings.

When asked about their professional relationships, *trust* proved to be the common theme in each female superintendent's discussion. Regular two-way communication served as the vehicle for them to be proactive and build mutual trust for strong relationships. The critical nature of strong relationships, specifically with board and community, provided the means of support as experienced female superintendent to act as a change agent. Each interviewed superintendent affirmed relationships were absolutely necessary for political leadership, and they established political power through their relationships. This referent power served to connect the superintendent to resources, both people and funds, that helped them achieve their goals, that is the political behaviors of the superintendents served as their approach to political leadership. In this section, I discuss the perceptions of female superintendents' political behaviors related to (a) establishing a common vision, (b) initiating and building relationships, (c) communicating and listening, (d) using referent power and influence effectively, (e) making wise decisions, and (f) evidencing trust and transparency.

Vision

All six superintendents formed their vision statement differently. One superintendent is using the existing vision from her predecessor and two others identified the state audit of their district as being the foundation for strategic planning and developing the vision statement. Another superintendent developed the vision statement internally through her own interviews of district and community constituents. Superintendents that developed new vision statements for their district used a collaborative process that involved conducting interviews, gathering feedback, seeking more input, and revising draft statements multiple times. Teacher unions, community leaders, teachers, and district employees participated in the collaborative process. April termed her vision as a “collective vision” of the district.

Little conflict was reported during the process of developing a vision statement which the superintendents believed drew little controversy because they were student centered. With little conflict in the collective effort, some felt drafting a vision for the district might not be an example of political leadership. When asked how she used political leadership when developing the district vision, June replied that the vision statement “just happened over time, so I don’t know.” Although many people were involved, there were no “political maneuvers” taking place.

Conversely, April and August both saw politics involved in vision formation. According to April, the inclusion of “stakeholders and seeing things from different points of view falls into the category of political lens.” August viewed the creation of a vision as “a process” of feedback, discussion, and especially for her, listening and questioning.

Once the vision statement was drafted and approved, each superintendent promoted the vision of the district.

Initiating Relationships

During the interviews, the female superintendents were asked, *Do you believe political leadership relates to communication and relationships?* All six superintendents agreed relationships and communication are a large part of political leadership. Jan explained forming relationships as, “You must make a deposit, before you make a withdrawal.” For female superintendents, relationships were key to effective political leadership and this process possessed a proactive view in initiating the relationship.

May: You really are not going to have impact in any of those areas without having a relationship with those you are trying to work with.

Jan: The beginning of success for any district. . . begins with the relationships that you build, the positive culture that you have, and the support you have for each other. We work [emphasis] *with others*. I obviously work for the board, but I’ve never been one to want to be the boss. . . . I believe that it takes everybody working together.

Once relationships are established, care ensued to assure decisions were communicated in a proactive stance to provide reasons or information concerning the situation. This ongoing process took on different forms but continued with both internal and external groups. Jan described the process of relationships as “listening, responding, acting, and involving” constituents. She asserted that a “good politician listens to the people” and uses reflective listening” by restating “what the person said to them [that] confirms if they are listening.” August’s description of political leadership also describes the process of developing relationships as “constant interaction with different constituents.” She explained the process as sharing reasons for decisions and gathering input as a continuous cycle. When April arrived in her district, she was asked by her

board to establish relationships. She quickly made a list of community and state leaders to meet and met with all of them in person. She described establishing relationships as a “24/7” activity for a superintendent.

Communication

All six superintendents spoke of good communication as a key aspect to build relationships.

Jan: Communication is key in building [community] relationships. Regardless of what kind of leader you are. . . it comes down to root skill sets [of] being a good listener, being a good communicator, and being someone that can relate to others and they relate to you. Build that trust.

August: If communication is not good, you might as well forget the political aspect. Your different constituents have to know what’s going on. . . . You have to be receptive to that two-way communication, to be a listener in particular. If you are not a listener, you are going to look behind and realize there is no one following you.

Communication served as the way to “get ahead of some of the repercussion of actions, or political moves,” according to June. Communication occurred with both internal and external constituents in formal and informal ways; the smaller the district, the more informal forms of communication were evident.

Female superintendents ensured they were visible to the community. In smaller districts, it was easier for superintendents to attend events where they could engage in conversations with parents, board members, and teachers and other constituents. Superintendents in larger districts scheduled time to be in schools to talk with teachers and staff; one superintendent ate lunch at schools to hear their ideas and concerns. Jan worked intentionally to create opportunities for people to “know me as a person” in order to realize “I’m approachable and I listen.”

Larger districts typically employed communication directors or communication teams; however, the female superintendents interviewed emphasized that they participated in creating the message. Communication through video, especially at the beginning of the year, enabled superintendents to share a vision for the district or the theme of the year. These videos are sometimes shown at schools during teacher meetings. Regardless of strategy, the superintendent's goal was to deliver the same message to the entire district.

External groups. Composition of external groups varied from district to district. Some female superintendents created advisory groups that had opportunities to hear information, review planning documents and vision statements, and provide feedback to the superintendent. External groups included community leaders and organizations, business leaders, and school board members. The female superintendents attended community meetings, such as Rotary, sat on community boards such as United Way and the YMCA. One superintendent served on the Industrial Foundation Board to ensure the school district perspectives were included in discussions and to hear first-hand the needs of the community.

Community. Relationships with local leaders provided the support needed to implement new programs such as career centers. The female superintendents talked about involving the community leaders in discussions concerning work ready high school graduates to fill employment needs in the local community. They invested time in telling community leaders about opportunities for the district business to work together on workforce development. They listened to business needs, took needs back to the district and then returned to business leaders with solutions. This process of input and solution

finding remained ongoing with the superintendent of one district, who engaged leaders from the community in the formation and implementation of new programs, to receive feedback in addition to creating support for the new program.

Female superintendents acted as a connector between the district and community, using the connection to form a partnership to better serve the work force and the families in the area. The connection with community also infiltrated their everyday life from grocery shopping to attending church—as everyone knew them. As April stated, “if you have a problem with [being recognized as the superintendent] do not do this.” If you don’t want to be “noticed,” then stay home with “the curtains closed.” The high visibility of the superintendent created a constant interaction with community members.

The media, especially the local newspaper, surfaced often while superintendents talked about their local community and community relationships: they all reported working intentionally to establish relationships with editors or educational reporters. Two superintendents shared examples of incorrect newspaper coverage and the political correctness of reaching back out to the paper. One woman recalled, “I couldn’t really show my frustration. It’s more of a dance. It’s a delicate balance if you are not happy about something because you do not want to make it worse.” The balance of addressing incorrect information required superintendents to judge how significant the misprinted information might become. A proactive stance to decide “if this is a battle that I need to fight,” stated August, required a political judgment about the impact of misinformation on public perception. Female superintendents also used articles and editorials in the paper to provide information to the broader community about programs, schools and students’ achievements, by schools and students, both academic and extracurricular.

School board. Comments about relationships with the board members were scattered throughout conversations about relationships and communication. The female superintendents began establishing relationships from the beginning of board members' tenure through individual meetings, board orientations, and yearly retreats. Individual meetings enabled superintendents to listen to the perspective of new members. They also created opportunities to know board members on a personal level by scheduling events to meet board members and their families.

Each superintendent gave an orientation for new board members to explain the role of the superintendent, and board members and to review the budget and responsibilities. Orientations provided time for them to discuss communication and expectations from board members especially when approached by constituents. The superintendents typically set 'ground rules' from the beginning of their tenure and emphasized that decisions would be based on students first. Orientations provided a time for superintendents and board members to discuss communication among them with particular emphasis about responding to constituents' complaints and problems. One superintendent explained the process to board members this way: "It is not their [the board members'] role to solve a problem. Their role is to listen and pass that information on to me so I can make sure the problem gets solved." Jan set an expectation for a "common understanding of no surprises" during her board orientation while June worked to ensure the board knew what was "coming down the pike" to avoid surprises.

When negative issues become press worthy or discussed publically, five of the six superintendents called their board members first. They expected board members to share information in the communication cycle with them to avoid surprises, especially in board

meetings. One superintendent recalled a mistake she made early in her tenure when she shared information with principals before sharing it with board members, which created conflict. She learned when the superintendent and board shared the same expectations, politics lessened and focus stayed on the district vision.

The female superintendents believed a supportive board enabled them to act as a change agent; they described supportive boards as professionals with clear expectations of board conduct within and outside of meetings. Board members focused on the vision of the district setting aside personal agendas. Supportive boards empowered the superintendent to run the district. Female superintendents asked their board chair for input and feedback when trust and support were the foundation of their relationship.

Not all female superintendents enjoyed a supportive board. March explained, her elected board changed when members voted to increase taxes, and newly elected members sought office by running on a platform to decrease taxes. Her change from a supportive board to a board with personal agendas brought conflict to decision making and threatened her continued tenure. With the change in members, a new chair maneuvered politically to end her tenure. Board conflict removed this superintendent from focusing on the vision of the district, “I really have been thrown off balance with all of this [conflict] and had to regain my focus and direct my path.” This female superintendent believed the politics of the chair intimidated her “because I was a woman and he was a man who wanted to run the district.” She found her new board unsupportive with her expectations of the board member’s roles differing from the board members’ personal agendas. She took reflective time for her to combat. This female

superintendent worked to maneuver and regain her positional power as she met with individual board members to regain board support.

Finances. School-board orientations included procedures and information about district finances. Reoccurring “intensive” financial education through workshops, weekly newsletters, and board discussions was needed regularly to assure board members could make informed decisions that were critical to the district’s success. The female superintendents reported board members were least experienced in making financial decisions. According to one superintendent,

They look at our budget of over \$60,000,000. To a lay person \$60,000,000 is a lot of money. When you look at a school district that is just the operating budget and not enough money to spend on extras. It’s hard to get them [the board] acclimated to understand exactly the financial part of it . . . what can be spent and where [it appears in the budget].

August found continued education with little turnover in her board enabled the board members to become a focused cohesive group able to deal with district strategic financial initiatives. The board is more “laser than like a buckshot with everything going every which way” when dealing with finances.

Although the female superintendents did not discuss allocation of resources in the context of the superintendent having power to make those decisions, they viewed seeking funds, raising taxes and addressing unfunded mandates as actions of a financial political leader: “Working through limited resources, that is a different form of political leadership. It involves listening.” This superintendent gathered feedback from all district employees on how to cut \$4,000,000 from the budget. The female superintendents often reported being transparent with the community about tax raises and the needs attached to

the increases. One district had information on a special Web site where the community could see how “every dollar is spent.”

Internal politics influences serving as a financial political leader, as was the case in April’s large district, where principals acted as political leaders. “Principals may use political leadership to incite a group of parents” when funding is in jeopardy for specific programs. She navigated building-level funding issues through her relationships with principals, seeking an understanding that “it is not about taking away funds but aligning funds with expectations.” Board support was key in this situation because April’s positional power did not allow her to make expenditures over \$5,000 without board approval. In her words, “I am not that powerful.” Female superintendents of smaller districts seemed to enjoy greater influence over the board in financial matters: “the board has always gone with my recommendation” when cutting the budget. March found in budget matters that it was “important to stay focused” on the vision of the district.

Board communication. Continued communication with the board members involved board-meeting preparation, protocols board behavior, and a supportive board. Once the female superintendents established a relationship with their board, continued communication according to pre-established protocol enabled the women to continue to focus on the district vision.

I am a very transparent person. . . . I shared with them [the board members that], I will always be transparent with you and I will tell you upfront. [The board] may not like what I say, but I want to make sure we’re all on the same page. Sometimes we will agree to disagree and that’s okay. I base all my decisions on the facts, and if I’m wrong I will admit it.

When agenda items needed approval, the female superintendents provided sufficient time for the member to reflect on the items and provide “clear rationale for how it will benefit kids” in the district, according to April. She explained,

The board agenda is about creating a rational and information. Every agenda item has a superintendent recommends item. The superintendent recommends but the board approves. So my job is to advise the board and request approval. So I’ve got to build support.

April works in a large district, and thus, the biweekly meetings of the board included significant preparation time. Preparation for a Monday board meeting entailed publishing materials on the prior Wednesday, responding to questions or providing needed clarifications at the end of the week. Each weekend before a board meeting, April called each board member to answer their questions and share items she felt most important; she called these weekends “board meeting weekends” which occurred twice a month. She viewed her weekend communication as a time to help board members “get what they need to be successful at the board meeting.” She called the Tuesday following a board meeting “a day of rest.” The Wednesday after a board meeting, she and her cabinet began loading the items for the next meeting.

Most female superintendents communicated on a weekly basis with the board and prepared a weekly or biweekly newsletter for the board. All six female superintendents found texting to be best form of communication for information that did not require a conversation. They discovered that most board members did not read their email messages and they did not use that mode of communication. When questions arose or communication of negative information occurred, superintendents called board members or held personal meetings to communicate with board members. Five of the six

superintendents emphasized the importance of keeping board members informed about issues and to ensuring they received first notice of issues.

Legislators. On the state level, two superintendents spoke about advocating for bills. Each superintendent believed relationships provided the key to support for education with legislators. Each proactively established a legislative relationship, initiating interactions before calling upon the legislator for something. Parts of these relationships took a formal invitation to school events, presentations or meeting with the board, other moments hinged on informal settings out in the community as gatherings such as Rotary, community groups or community events as female superintendents worked to be visible to legislators. These formal and informal settings enabled discussions concerning the process of legislation and effects of mandated legislation.

Internal groups. Relationships with district employees enabled female superintendents to gather input to understand the reactions of others before announcements or decisions were made. The female superintendents built internal relationships just like those in external groups through trust and communication. Each female superintendent spoke of establishing a collaborative team in her district office that included the assistant or deputy superintendents, human resource directors, coordinators of food and transportation services and various directors. Confidantes (i.e., individuals they confided in) were typically female internal employees in the district office.

Contact between superintendent and school administrators increased as district size decreased and monthly meetings provided regular, formal contact between the superintendent and principals. March made an effort to ensure her school administrators knew about situations first because she believes sharing information with both district

leaders and school leaders built trust. She added that, “this puts me in conflict with my board members” because they expected to be told first.

Power and Influence

As the questions turned toward the word *power* in relationships, the female superintendents reported viewing their position as one of influence; they rarely used the word *power* during their interviews, because it was an “uncomfortable” term for them. Conversely, they viewed influence as a component of relationship building and political leadership. April explained the interaction of relationships and influence as finding common ground.

April: You don’t have power over [people]. The only way that you can influence people or bring them along is through a relationship . . . through creating a common interest. You have to build relationships with [constituents] and [assure they] understand what you’re trying to accomplish. You try to bring them along in a role that aligns with what you are trying to do.

April believed power for the superintendency came from “the mission of the work.” However, the work had to be completed through relationships because a superintendent must work *with others* to achieve a goal.

All six female superintendents included listening as an important skill to influence others. Whereas, June believed she influenced others “by giving them a voice,” Jan influenced others in a positive way that comes through “mutual respect.” These superintendents viewed influence as serving as a role model to others by basing decisions on the best interest of children. Once input from others has been gathered, influence required the superintendent to share the “why” for decisions with as much transparency deemed appropriate. Influence included having a strong work ethic, “being willing to work in the same way I ask others to work.”

The female superintendents acknowledged that the position holds influence, by reaction to the title, but was “not always good” according to May. The superintendency holds positional power according to March, something she did not understand until she assumed the position. Superintendent positional power often has others comply with requests simply because of the position. According to March,

It’s not the motivator to have power. . . . [Rather] I see my role as providing information to all of the board members so that they can make good decisions for students. I believe in getting input from stakeholders, listening to stakeholders, and identifying needs as a group and then coming up with a solution that is best to meet their needs.

For two female superintendents, getting others to collaborate or participate in decision making was difficult when they began as superintendent. Each worked to form a collaborative team.

Decision Making

Daily decision making required political forethought for how decisions affect others. August explained, “I think you always have to stop and think about how this is going to impact others and that is a really political move.” April shared that she looked for employees with a political lens who could envision the future impact of decisions and situations. For the female superintendents in this study, the core of all decisions rests on the outcome for students; they used data as both justification and transparency for decisions. Data included input from district personnel including deputy or assistant superintendents, cabinet members, directors, advisory councils, principals and teachers. The range of those involved in decision making depended upon the confidentiality of situation and time available. Nonetheless, whenever possible, the female superintendents

asserted that they sought a clear understanding of the situation, information from as many individuals as possible, and took time to clarify and process issues whenever possible.

August, talked at length about the pace of decision making required by superintendents. The process of gaining input and reaching consensus is “slower and longer,” beginning with conversations and providing resources to others, gaining input from others’ perspectives. She explained the pace of the work in the superintendency is much slower than serving as a high school principal. Change took longer to unfold as superintendent.

Based on the female superintendents’ comments during interviews, they perceive political leadership works in tandem with decision making. One superintendent recalled the outcome of a particularly difficult decision: “I demoted a principal. That was the toughest political decision I made because [people in the district and community] came out in droves in support of [the principal] and against me.” Although the board supported her decision, which was viewed as necessary for students, for citizens within the community it was difficult politically. Because she could retire at any time, she found having the option of retirement was “freeing” in making decisions.

The political ramifications of decisions also affects the board members. For example, when boards are asked to raise taxes it becomes a very political issue, often creating conflict between board members and the citizens that elected them. May remarked that superintendent leadership influences district improvements, and a change in leadership can quickly cause the district to “go awry”.

Trust

The female superintendents in this study believed trust built the cornerstone of relationships: each worked to build trust with both external and internal constituents. Trust took considerable time to build and required a level of transparency and honesty between the superintendent and others which did not require a favor in return. Jan warned, “Build that trust in the relationship and do it intentionally by not asking for something in return.” Without a level of trust, female superintendents believed relationships faltered, which impaired their work and the district. According to August,

If you can't trust somebody and you are always having a second guess at what they are telling you, then you become very unproductive. . . . If you don't have [trust] then you might as well hang it up. The organization is going to become dysfunctional.

Decisions made that required change, especially change or demotion of personnel, might erode trust with internal employees. Following such decisions, a period of rebuilding trust among internal constituents is needed.

Confidence

The six female superintendents commented on confidence as a difference between men and women political leaders.

I think we [women] don't have the confidence in ourselves like some men do. I think it goes back to the way we were raised because . . . we didn't aspire to be a [superintendent]. It will be interesting to look at the younger group coming up for those women starting to seek out the leadership roles. Hopefully, we have forged the road so that they don't feel that way.

According to one superintendent the struggle with confidence can be viewed at all levels of political leadership: “The legislators are all men, and you have to elbow your way in to be heard. That is not always a comfortable thing. It makes women feel vulnerable.”

They reported that navigating the political system requires relationships in the political

arena to make connections. Making a connection required confidence to initiate relationships and to make tough decisions.

Personality of a Political Leader

During their interviews some female superintendents described traits of a political leader, in which they noted that personality plays a role in success.

August: There are many superintendents who are much more savvy at it than I am. Is it something I enjoy doing? No. Is it something I need to do? Yes. I do it, but there are superintendents who really thrive on that political aspect of the job.

Jan: I think there's an art to [political leadership]. . . . I think it begins with building relationships and [having] strong communication skills. I call it "making deposits before you need to make a withdrawal."

Jan believed establishing relationships and communication skills enabled her to act as a political leader.

Some personalities navigate it better than others. . . . [It requires] someone that is a very confident leader. I think their strengths would be listener, communicator, and relationship builder. If you have those skill sets, I think you can learn the technicalities of how to navigate the [political] system.

Both Jan and August expressed their belief that some people are much more comfortable as a political leader than others. April perceived that being a political leader requires superintendents to be willing to be involved in politics every day.

This is a role that is accountable not only as a board of education, but also to the public and ultimately to the students. So, if you don't want to play in a world that's full of politics and [requires] different ways of thinking about things, then you really don't belong in this role because [political leadership is required] every day.

The superintendent must have a personality to deal with the pressure of politics each day.

Female Leadership

The superintendents in this study evidenced different perspectives about female leadership in the superintendency. Two women, talked about an “inner circle” of superintendents in the Commonwealth, a group composed mostly of men, who appeared to promote each other as well as support one another as they move into and out of various positions in different districts. Members of the “inner circle” seemed to have “bounce back” opportunities in reemployment through support of others. However, the more tenured superintendents refuted the idea of an “inner circle” or understood that some believed it existed but did not agree with the notion. During the interview, I surmised some female superintendents interviewed were part of the “inner circle” and others were not. May reflected,

I really see it as a pretty even playing field . . . I don't think there is an inner circle [within the superintendents]. I can see what they are saying [about an inner circle]. . . You just have to volunteer and roll up your sleeves.

She viewed those working in state organizations as simply their volunteering to serve in those organizations. However, other superintendents could see why their colleagues may believe there is an “inner circle” composed of former and current superintendents that seemed to do favors for each other.

The female superintendents possessed a strong sense of justice and advocacy for children. All six claimed that “what is best for students” was the core element for decision making. When discussing politics, they sorted behaviors according to “what I will do and what I will not do.” Doing political favors was viewed as the negative side of politics, something that always lurked in the background of political leadership.

Issues related to physical mobility (i.e., ability to relocate elsewhere) entered their conversations about political leadership. Women who were long-term district employees spoke about the risks of serving as superintendent.

It is one thing to go to another community, and if you don't do well, you can leave. They [district personnel and local citizens] just remember you as the one that did not do well. [When my] family is rooted [in the community]...I want to be successful because it is important for me, for our community, and for our schools.

The risk of “failing” in the community where one lived thus, provided added pressure to the superintendency for those with significant tenure in the district. One interviewee suggested that may deter women from serving as superintendent.

As one who relocated to a new community to assume a superintendency, April remarked,

You better be ready to say, “I don't want to do this anymore. This is now outside of my comfort level and what I want to do.” It's a choice to be in a district or not to be in a district. If you have kids and family members in a community and you're beaten up all the time publicly, that has a toll on kids. I think you have to know all that going into it. . . . When it doesn't work out, they are interrupting their kid's education. That's a whole lot of stuff to worry about, that I don't have to worry about because of where I am in my career.

These female superintendents added they believe that women have better communication skills and planning skills than men. Women tend to be very engaged. Men often have others doing work for them. One superintendent gave this example:

When we [females] go to state meetings, I'll go by myself and take my own notes. [Men] bring people with them, and they take the notes and then go and implement. They are not able to communicate what is really going on [in their district] because they have somebody else doing a lot of that for them.

Another superintendent serving in the most rural district of all six interviewees added this perspective about female leadership:

I think because I am a woman, [the male principals] think I'm overreacting [when there is an accusation of sexual discrimination]. I

think [enforcement of harassment policy] is one place that there's tension between [us]. The difference between men and women in our district.

She then spoke at length about accusations of sexual discrimination, which she took seriously. Men in her district thought she overreacted because she is female by developing and enforcing sexual discrimination and harassment policies.

However, most female superintendents in this study did not view being female as a disadvantage. A veteran superintendent stated,

I don't feel I am treated differently because I am a female but I think that you have got to establish yourself. . . . I really think that you have to work hard initially to building that rapport and to build trust in your community [whether] you are male or female.

The discussion about differences in male leadership and female leadership appeared to generate discomfort for several women during their interviews.

Summary

Through the iterative process of IPA, the themes of preservice experience, practices and perceptions of political leadership, and behavior of political leaders emerged. Female superintendents perceive political leadership behaviors requires establishing relationships through communication and trust and they reported that decision making is based on their vision tied to what is perceived to be best for students. As leaders, women capitalize on referent power, believing they have power through others rather than through the position they hold. Female political leaders possess confidence, as well as listened attentively and invited others into their conversation. In Chapter 5, the findings are reviewed in terms of preservice experience, women's leadership model, and levels of political leadership to form conclusions concerning

female superintendents' political leadership.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The superintendency is known as the most male-dominated profession in the United States (Björk & Keedy, 2001), even though a majority of P12 educators are women. Although previous research focused on barriers to women seeking the superintendency, recent research has examined how women lead school districts. Female administrators identified politics as a main barrier to their assuming the superintendent position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007), particularly because women view politics and power differently than their male colleagues (Björk, 2000; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). School board members emphasize the role of political leader by seeking superintendents who can navigate conflict in the midst of ever-growing pluralistic communities (Cuban, 1988; Kowalski et al., 2011). Political acuity and professional networking are thus critically important in negotiating the labyrinth to obtain the highest position in a school district—and to retain it. This research is significant because female superintendents defined their engagement as a political strategist in their own voice, differing from masculine terms typically associated with political leadership by superintendents (Newton, 2006; Skrla, 2000).

This exploratory study gathered perceptions of experienced Kentucky female superintendents as political leaders. During the first of two phases, 13 female superintendents responded to an online questionnaire sent to all 33 female superintendents serving public districts in Kentucky during the spring of 2015. The demographic data produced a snapshot of who served as the chief executive officer of a district at that time, and their responses to forced-response and open-ended prompts provided information about their preparation for the superintendency. During the second

phase of data collection, a series of two private interviews were conducted with six experienced female superintendents in Kentucky who volunteered to participate or were recruited to assure diversity of districts across the Commonwealth. The first interview protocol included prompts to answer the research question, *How do female superintendents foster relationships and use power to influence others?* The second interview with each of the six women sought data to answer the research question, *What behaviors do female superintendents engage in or implement as political leaders?* The multiple steps of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (Smith et al., 2009) were followed carefully to assure findings present the perspectives shared by the interviewed female superintendents.

The first major section below presents key findings from the analysis of questionnaire data, which is followed by four sections that discuss key findings from analysis of both the questionnaire and interview data: (a) preservice preparation of female superintendents, (b) their definition of political leadership; (c) their perceptions about the process of political leadership, and (d) their levels of influence as political leaders. Next is a discussion of study limitations and implications for research and practice, which is followed by a reflection of lessons I learned from my professional experiences and from conducting this study.

Kentucky Female Superintendents: A Snapshot

The online questionnaire provided a brief description of a Kentucky female superintendent. Among the 13 questionnaire respondents, 11 reported they were over the age of 46—most over the age of 50. They moved into the superintendency late in their career after spending many years in the classroom as teachers and in the district office in

a variety of positions—similar to female superintendents’ career paths nationally (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski et al., 2011; Tallerico, 1999). A surprising finding is that only seven questionnaire respondents reported having any experience as a principal. Because certification for any P12 educational administrative position in Kentucky requires completion of a master’s degree (e.g., MA, MEd, MS), it was also somewhat surprising that only five female superintendents indicated that they held an advanced graduate degree (e.g., EdS, EdD, PhD). Most respondents indicated that they spent their entire career in one district (typically located in a rural area) and obtained the superintendency as an internal candidate (i.e., they did not seek the superintendency in a district other than where they worked).

With regard to the five roles typically assumed by superintendents—instructional leader, manager, political leader, communicator, and applied social scientist (Björk & Kowalski, 2005; Kowalski, 2001), they reported that focusing on the superintendent role of instructional leader was most important for them. However, when asked how frequently they enacted the five roles, they reported most often being a communicator followed by instructional leader, manager, political leader, and applied social scientist respectively. Although their work required them to assume the role of political leader often, they indicated that engaging in political leadership was the most challenging for them—particularly early in their tenure as superintendent.

Preservice Preparation: Female Experiences and Mentoring

Among the five roles of the superintendency, female superintendents reported being least prepared for the role of political leadership with 11 among the 13 (85%) questionnaire respondents and all 6 interviewed participants indicating they lacked

preparation. Their preservice coursework, leadership experiences, and mentors failed to give them sufficient preparation for the role. Although 80% of superintendents, both male and female reported their overall academic preparation was either good or excellent in the 2010 national survey (Kowalski et al., 2011), Kentucky female superintendents who responded to the online questionnaire and participated in interviews perceived their academic preparation for political leadership was minimal. They described it as limited to a class discussion or reading papers about political leadership while completing required courses to obtain superintendent certification. To remediate this deficiency, they suggested preservice coursework, which includes scenarios and case studies to examine political maneuvering and determine ways to balance the needs of various constituent groups.

Administrative Experiences

The traditional pathway taken to the superintendency passes through the secondary principal position, a path traveled most frequently by men (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft et al., 2007; Tallerico, 2000). The conflict, complexity, and demands of the high school principalship (e.g., working with various constituents groups, navigating media questions) is perceived as a strong preparation for the politics of the superintendency (Tallerico, 2000). Although the high school principalship provides critically needed experience in acting as a political leader, few of the Kentucky female superintendents participating in this study followed this career track to the superintendency. Those Kentucky female superintendents, who responded on the questionnaire that they had served as school administrators and classroom teachers, typically had those experiences in elementary schools. Even more surprising, half of the

questionnaire respondents as well as four of the six interviewees reported they had no experience as a school administrator (e.g., assistant principal, principal). Instead they gained administrative experience by serving in various district positions, such as program coordinator or division director, as well as an assistant or associate superintendent. Based on data collected through the questionnaire and the interviews, it is evident that previous experiences in positions in the district office did not provide these study participants with sufficient opportunities to practice political leadership prior to assuming the superintendency. Unfortunately, a sitting superintendent may shield those beneath the position from politics by acting as the sole “political strategist” (Björk & Gurley, 2005, p. 167) for the district. Further, some women indicated during their interviews that they did not aspire to serve as superintendent; thus, their career path did not include purposeful gathering of political skills and knowledge as well as networking, affecting their initial preparation for political leadership.

Mentoring

Although mentoring has proven to be an important aspect to socialization into the superintendency (Björk et al., 2002a; Enrich & Hansford, 2004), female superintendents in this study reported that they lacked support from female mentors in developing political leadership because males typically served as their mentors. When asked how women could enhance development of political leadership skills before assuming the superintendency, three interviewees asserted it would be beneficial to have more women serve as superintendent to support their political socialization. Prior research has revealed that women aspiring to or assuming their first superintendency position often do not have a strong network of female role models and mentors (Brunner,

2000a; Copeland & Calhoun, 2014; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Approximately, 30% of female superintendents in the 2010 decennial study (Kowalski et al., 2011) also reported that the limited number of female role models restricted access to the superintendency for women.

Female superintendents participating in this study believed the next generation of women superintendents may benefit from those females currently serving to explain the process and encourage females in political leadership. While men encouraged and supported women to seek the superintendency, their modeling of political leadership often evidenced different values. For most females, the role of political leadership and the role of communicator are intertwined. Questionnaire respondents reported daily communication with internal constituents and multiple or weekly communication with the school board. Yet, those same female superintendents reported their mentors did not provide significant support for the communication role.

Mobility

Four of the six experienced female superintendents interviewed were internal candidates from their current district. Previous studies found females lacked mobility in seeking superintendent positions due to their husband careers or family responsibilities, which limited opportunities for them to move (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Lemasters & Roach, 2012; Tallerico, 1999). These barriers to assuming a position elsewhere and their career pathways that did not include serving as a school principal may be reasons for the limited number of female superintendents in Kentucky.

Political Leadership: Female Definition

The superintendent role of political leadership continues to evolve (Björk & Gurley, 2005). The first appearance of the political leadership role occurred in the 1930s when Callahan (1967) identified the political role during significant educational changes that required the allocation of scarce resources making the superintendent a lobbyist for funds. Cuban (1988) later described political leadership in the superintendency as a negotiator-statesperson who dealt with conflict among diverse groups. However, the term *political strategist* (Björk & Gurley, p. 167) seems most appropriate to describe female superintendents in this study. Although political leadership encompasses three roles (i.e., lobbyist, statesperson, strategist), females in this study focused on strategies to attain their vision, which included building a network. In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, the conception of political leadership that informed this study (Bolman & Deal, 2013) and a working definition of political leadership are presented. Recall that a *political leader* is one who (a) determines allocation of resources, (b) sets a vision for the district, (c) seeks input from individuals and groups in the decision-making process, and (d) navigates conflict.

Based on analyses of interview comments by experienced female superintendents in this study, political leadership may be defined as the follows: *Political leadership is a dynamic, proactive process in which a superintendent (a) initiates relationships, (b) gathers input from others, (c) connects the district to resources in order to (d) advocate for a vision based on what is best for children.* During the interviews, none of the six female superintendents defined political leadership as determining the allocation of scarce resources. Surprisingly, when questioned during interviews about allocating

scarce resources, none of the women perceives allocating resources as political leadership. However, they indicated that financial issues (i.e., raising taxes, decreasing funding, allocating funds) were political issues to be solved by gathering input from others.

Determining the allocation of resources is typically regarded as acting with *positional power*—formal authority conferred on the position (French & Raven, 2005), which these female superintendents reported employing seldom. They acknowledged that financial decisions were the responsibility of a superintendent, but in their practice they relied upon *referent power*—power with others—to solve financial issues. Because superintendents' financial actions are contingent on school-board approval, female superintendents posit that they do not actually allocate resources but instead suggest financial solutions. Only one superintendent in this study served in a financial position at the district level prior to assuming the superintendency. Hence, the lack of financial leadership experience among other study participants may be a reason why they talked about gathering input from others prior to making decisions. The female superintendents thus reported acting as a political strategist—seeking and winning support—with their board and community to solve financial problems. Interestingly, they believed the superintendent connected the district to resources (e.g., community leaders, legislators, internal constituents, alternative sources) to further their district vision. They included internal and external constituents as alternative resources. Relationships served as a way to gather input and communicate decisions with transparency when financial issues arose in the district.

Experienced female superintendents reported that they carefully considered the ramifications of their decisions, using a political lens to anticipate disagreements and proactively communicate with constituents to minimize conflict. For them, *political leadership requires (a) a proactive lens to assess the impact of decisions and (b) build support for change while simultaneously limiting pressure from constituents and using constructive conflict effectively*. This political perspective also entailed knowing how to gain support for initiatives by communicating and listening to internal and external constituents. Noteworthy is that fact that these women welcomed discord, appreciating some dissent and contradiction, which Grogan (2003) suggests is essential for success as a superintendent. Although conflict brought differing insight to decision making, it was perceived as a natural part of the political process when (a) communicating and listening and (b) building trust and responding with transparency.

Political Leadership Processes: Female Perspectives

Female superintendents in this study described a process of acting as a political leader in which relationships served as resources for making wise decisions and supporting change, a finding evident in previous research (Brunner, 2000a, 2000b; Gilligan, 1993; Grogan 2003; Noddings, 2013). Further, women value process whereas men emphasize outcomes (Helgensen, 1990), which aligns with how female superintendents in this study perceived the process of acting as a political leader.

Analyses of interview data, both individually and collectively, revealed that the experienced female superintendents identified six behaviors to define their political-leadership process: (a) establishing a common vision, (b) initiating and building relationships, (c) communicating and listening, (d) using referent power and influence

effectively, (e) making wise decisions, and (f) evidencing trust and transparency.

Somewhat unique is that fact that all six indicated that the process begins with a common vision based on an ethic of care for students. The women then develop relationships to further the vision of the district. They also articulated clearly their political agenda at the beginning of relationships, thus promoting empowerment of both parties as found in previous research (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Block, 1987; Brunner, 2000a, 2000b; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kruse & Prettyman, 2008; Schaap, 2014; Shakeshaft, 2010; Shakeshaft et al., 2007).

As the process continues, their communication and listening strengthens the relationships through seeking input and feedback from constituents—thus establishing female superintendents’ referent power. Watkins and Smith (2014) noted that women who possess strong political acumen are more-likely to break down barriers in male-dominated organizations by using referent power. Likewise, the experienced female superintendents in this study capitalized on their referent power by involving others and building support for decisions. Thus, these women minimized conflict through building relationships and establishing trust. When conflict occurs, previously built support and transparent communication provides the “why” of the decision, which aids in minimizing the effects of dissent. Lax and Sebenius (1986) viewed positive political leadership as relying upon moral principles that establish (a) mutual understanding and communication procedures, (b) communication of transparency of decisions, and (c) an ethic of care of actions and decisions for constituent. The relational trust fostered by the female superintendents in this study strengthened support for their vision for the district. Through the process of political leadership, they construct a lateral or web-like leadership structure.

All six female superintendents described themselves as transformational leaders who served as change agents. Burns (1978) referred to gaining followers' trust and confidence as acts of a transformational leader. These six women believed they were collaborative leaders, using others input to make wise decisions. Effective leaders serve as a change agent by (a) establishing a vision that balances the interests of various groups and (b) a strategy for implementing the vision that addresses internal and external pressures (Kotter, 1988). Figure 5.1 below displays the process female superintendents enact political leadership.

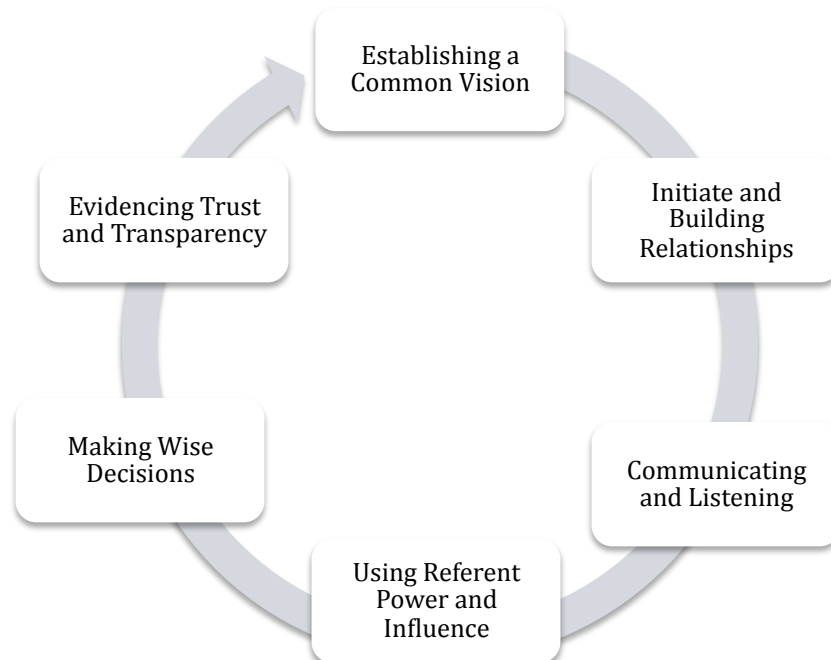


Figure 5.1 Female process of political leadership adapted from Stanford, Oates, and Flores (1995).

Through interviews with business leaders, Stanford and colleagues (1995) developed a female leadership model incorporating female leadership styles with a female view of power, which was modified to provide a schema of political leadership

described by study participants (see Figure 5.1). Their model characterized a woman leader as one who operates with referent or expert power, involving others in a team-based management approach, outlining how women engage with others, thus building a team. In this study, female superintendents emphasized the importance of broad-based communication and relationship building based on mutual trust. Although the leadership model developed by Stanford and colleagues outlines how women create a team, female superintendents in this study described a process of political leadership based on network building. Similarly, the model draws upon key characteristics women utilize as leaders (i.e., communication, referent power, vision). The political-leadership process described by women in this study suggests they use common characteristics of business leaders while acting as a district political leader; thus, decision making and relationship building anchor the process of political leadership, not simply team building.

Developing political acuity requires time, understanding of community context, and relationships built on trust. The experienced female superintendents in this study possessed political insight to build support among constituents, sought input from appropriate sources, initiated and established relationships to use as resources and advocated for the district's vision. For them, political acumen is sharpened by experience and only marginally obtained through preservice experiences; thus, the challenge for new female superintendents acting as political leaders is developing political acumen. Because political leadership is complex and ever changing, acting as a political strategist requires flexibility, insight, and acumen according to experienced female superintendents. Although the process of political leadership outlined above produces relationships built

through referent power, the experienced female superintendents in this study used their relationships strategically as they politicked for district initiatives (see Chapter 4).

When answering questions about power, each experienced female superintendent quickly moved to a discussion of referent power—*with others*—preferring the word *influence*. They described how they relied on their referent power, yet expressed how little power they possessed when acting alone. While two superintendents admitted they possessed positional power, they expressed displeasure with the notion that others might comply with decisions simply because they were superintendents. Yulk (2013) likewise discovered that females found some displeasure when others complied with their requests simply due to their positional power, preferring referent power when seeking consensus.

Somewhat surprising was the finding that female superintendents interviewed during this study were uncomfortable with the term *power*. Each one discounted positional power and immediately turned the conversation toward *power with others*—referent power—capitalizing on relational influence. While some comments downplayed the idea of power, it was evident that they possessed and used significant power to lead; their preferred power is collaborative rather than authoritarian. Through the process of political leadership of building and nurturing strong referent power, female superintendents are powerful. Because females' power derives from others, they must establish a process to build relationships.

Through responses to open-ended prompts on the questionnaire and interview questions, most female superintendents in this study explained what they would not do as a political leader (e.g., doing favors for others for something in return) and then shared their perception of political leadership. Although with apparent ease during their

interviews when they described the negative side of political leadership, most struggled to define political leadership, apparently because the norm for political leadership they observed involved immoral decisions based only on giving favors and addressing adults' needs. Because female superintendents perceived moral decisions by P12 educators must be guided by an *ethic of care* (Noddings, 1994) for students, political leadership that did not was considered immoral. Women interviewed during this study wanted to make sure I understood that granting favors were contrary to their moral values. During interviews, the six superintendents shared how they "made peace" with serving as a political leader by using terms such as "advocate" and focusing on student-centered actions as the goal for enacting political leadership. Shifting to a discussion about the process of political leadership and discussing their influence in such processes eased their angst about discussing political leadership. It was quite evident that the norm for male political leadership did not fit with female leadership patterns.

Political Leadership: Levels of Influence

Female superintendents discussed influence by political leaders at two levels, local and state (see Table 5.1). Female superintendents networked at both the local and state level during their tenure, although their length of tenure as a superintendent appears to influence their active engagement in state-level political leadership. While they indicated that participation in local politics was critical for their success, they felt free to decide whether or not to become engaged in state-level issues. Female superintendents described a progression through the levels of political leadership as first building local relationships and finally serving as an advocate at the state level.

Table 5.1

Levels of Political Leadership

Levels of Influence		Constituents
	Internal	District employees, district office staff, advisory groups, school-based governance council members, teacher leaders
Local	External	School board members, the media, business leaders, local community leaders and groups, parents, personnel at higher education institutions and region service centers, other school districts
State		Superintendent colleagues, members of state organizations, legislators, commissioner of education and other KDE personnel

Local Political Leadership

Establishing relationships with constituents defined the internal expectations for communication and vision setting as well as gathering feedback and input for decision making. The female superintendents in this study reported internal relationships vital to create a political lens, which included foreseeing ramifications of decisions they made. As the chief executive officer for their district, they created a web-like structure of trusted constituents as they gathered information and acted proactively.

Working as their district’s spokesperson, each worked to make connections with outside government, community, business and educational entities. While connecting the district externally, each served as a bridge to bring back resources, input, and relationships for her district. These female superintendents described making “deposits before making withdrawals” in order to develop a comprehensive network of constituents from whom they drew outside support or resources when needed to achieve district initiatives. The female superintendents serving in larger districts reported acting as a

negotiator, especially between their school board and broader community. Brunner and Grogan (2005a) found the greater the pluralistic needs of the community, the more the board and others expect the superintendent to negotiate among groups. Female superintendents in this study likewise worked to maintain a balance between keeping their district's agenda simple while seeking outside support to solve problems creatively.

State Political Leadership

Female superintendents in this study differed in their views about their political leadership and influence on the state level. Three reported only minimal participation in state organizations and did not speak about advocacy for education legislation statewide. One of those three indicated she worked at the state level, primarily to establish relationships with political leaders and only occasionally to gain support for district instructional initiatives. Three other female superintendents reported during their interviews that they served on state committees and organizations and actively engaged with legislators for statewide educational initiatives. They served as an advocate for public education across Kentucky and possessed a statewide view of the superintendent's political leadership role. Their long tenure as superintendent provided time and opportunity for them to move into senior positions among state superintendents and develop the political skills and strategic lens to act in the state political arena.

Most surprising during the interviews was use of the term "inner circle" to describe a network among state superintendents that self-promoted and performed favors for members of the group. According to two female superintendents, the inner circle was based on the concept, "I'll scratch your back and you scratch mine." This elite network of former and current male superintendents generated emotional commentary among the

female interviewees, particularly for two who alluded to key inner-circle members that were particularly powerful. Williams et al., (2007) found in their study that Kentucky female superintendents tend to possess four leadership traits—integrity, trust, honesty, empathy—that provides a moral compass for their decision making, which is juxtaposed to traits of favoritism perceived to exist among inner-circle members.

Some female superintendents in this study involved in statewide politics had networked with members of the “inner circle.” Length of tenure as a superintendent not only influenced the women’s involvement in statewide politics for education but also their perceptions of political leadership. Additionally, several interviewees reported their contracts had been extended a second or third contract, with typical contract length of four years. Grissom and Andersen (2012) found average turnover for superintendents to be three years, and because length of tenure often influences their advocacy at the state level, many superintendents may not acquire significant tenure to act as a statewide advocate during their career. A small group of long-tenured superintendents, apparently predominately male according to study participants, appear to constitute the “inner circle” that works within the state political arena thus has significant impact on Kentucky education. Serving on the state political level appears to be a choice for superintendents, one in which some women feel comfortable while others do not due to their length of tenure in the superintendency.

Recommendations for Further Research

This exploratory study examined experienced Kentucky female superintendents’ perceptions of political leadership through administration of an online questionnaire and then interviews with experienced district leaders. Due to the low response rate on the

questionnaire (only 13 of the 33 currently serving female superintendents responded), findings from the questionnaire have limited generalizability. Participants for the qualitative portion of the study were intentionally limited to female superintendents with at least three years of experience, a decision made based on previous research about female superintendents. Despite considerable efforts to recruit interview participants, only six women agreed to participate in two interviews—and most worked in rural school districts. Because Kentucky has only two districts classified as urban (i.e., Fayette County Public Schools, Jefferson County Public School) and only one of those districts currently has a female superintendent, her anonymity as a study participant would have been compromised. Hence, additional research on female superintendents' role as political leader needs to be conducted in suburban and urban locals in other states where study participants' identities would not be compromised. Another possibility for research conducted within Kentucky would be a study about political leadership perceived by former female superintendents working in other positions and by former female superintendents that had retired within a recent five-year period.

Another potential limitation of this study is that only one interviewee who reported feeling comfortable enacting political leadership had served as high school principal prior to assuming district-level administrative positions. Although not a finding from this study, it appears that serving as a secondary school principal may prepare females for political leadership. In the 2010 decennial study, only 26% of all female superintendents had served as a high school principal in contrast to 56% of males who served in the secondary position (Kowalski et al., 2011). Further, almost all female superintendents participating in this study, either as a respondent to the online

questionnaire or as an interviewee, did not actively seek a superintendent position.

Further research is needed to explore how prior service as a secondary school principal and intentional job search for the superintendency influences how female superintendents perceive and enact political leadership.

Because this study sought only the female perspective about political leadership by the top district administrator, research is needed to explore and define perceptions about political leadership according to male superintendents. Findings from such a study may enable female superintendents to navigate and understand politics more clearly. Recent emphasis on transformational leadership and collective leadership to ensure student learning in P12 schools appears to be moving upward into school districts. Understanding how male and female leaders perceive politics and behave politically may provide greater information for females about networking and understanding political maneuvering.

Additional research that gathers perceptions from internal and external constituents of districts led by female superintendents may provide greater understanding about their efficacy as political leaders. If conducted as a single case study, an extensive district profile could broaden understanding about a female superintendent's political leadership and provide additional perspectives about how to enhance her leadership efficacy, thus providing information to support the preparation of aspiring female superintendents. Additionally, gathering input from new female superintendents during their first year and then later in their career may benefit those who seek to understand how effective and ineffective female superintendents work as political strategists.

Recommendation for Practice

According to many female superintendents in this study, their preservice experiences failed to prepare them adequately for the top position in the district. Findings from this study reflect important implications for superintendent preparation, experiences, and mentoring. Hence, an implication for preparing and developing female superintendents is placing greater importance on political leadership generally and the legislative process particularly to develop their comfort with political leadership. Because state-level organizations and advocacy are predominately conducted by males, few female superintendents have role models. Thus, it is essential for successful experienced female superintendents to serve as role models and mentors for aspiring and novice female superintendents.

While most new superintendents receive training as they begin serving in their new position, several participants in this study commented on the lack of role models, specifically for female superintendents participating in statewide superintendent training. According to Copeland and Calhoun (2014), new and novice female superintendents benefitted from long-term support by experienced female superintendents who served both as a formal mentor and an informal confidant.

Another strategy to prepare female superintendents for political leadership is the focus more deeply on the concept during preservice preparation. Whenever possible, literature that presents the female perspective of leadership generally and political leadership specifically needs to be incorporated into course readings and discussions. When possible, preservice preparation should include opportunities for aspiring female superintendents to gain experience working with board members, identifying political

groups, and networking intended to develop more political acuity for new female superintendents.

Lessons Learned

As a former principal and current president of a private P12 academy, I studied the superintendency during my doctoral studies because political leadership has been an aspect of my work since moving out of the classroom. I have served in Catholic school administrative positions that have been traditionally defined by male standards. Because the P12 academy where I currently serve as president has three principals reporting to me, my work responsibilities are much like that of a superintendent in a small Kentucky school district.

During my Kentucky Principal Internship Program experiences, two female administrators served as my mentors. They were the first females to openly discuss with me political leadership roles and gender-specific expectations for female school leaders. During my internship year, I learned many strategies to use as a political strategist. Developing my political acuity enabled me to anticipate barriers to implementing decisions as well as address dissention that required political maneuvering. Reflecting now on those face-to-face conversations, phone calls, and lived experiences with my mentors during my internship demonstrates to me the importance of women having female mentors who provide insights about understanding politics from a female's perspective. Even though I had two female mentors during my first year as an administrator, I was not fully prepared for the conflict and political maneuvering that often results from resistance to change. I learned that being a change agent requires

considerable political insight and political judgment to advance the implementation of strategic initiatives toward a vision.

My female mentors provided specific knowledge and coaching concerning gender specific obstacles that aiding me in developing a political lens needed to map out steps to build support through relationships. This political lens allows me to view future ramifications to decisions made and to think “politic” before announcing a decision to those from whom I must garner critical support in order to succeed. Politics was and continues to be critical to my success and survival as a female administrator. More importantly, that mentoring included a *female lens* through which I understand expectations and gender norms for female leaders.

Conducting this research increased my understanding about how a *professional network* plays a strategic role in working toward achieving a vision. Relationships require an initial deposit and continued kindling of trust to remain viable for strategic efforts in the future. Because decision making may quickly change a relationship, a political lens of future effects of decisions is necessary. The web-like relational structure that female superintendents initiate as well as their process to establish themselves and then continue working as a political leader brings structure to politics, which females rarely discuss. Politics, in a sense, is capitalizing on relationships, networks, and connections to support district efforts. In the context of Kentucky’s rural, patriarchy culture, the established norms in politics are male, which requires females to search for how a woman can act politically while simultaneous maintain the culturally established norms for women.

Serving now in the context of a Deep South culture, I understand the importance of cultural and political norms, which can vary from community to community. Entering a culture of political favors was initially challenging for me even though I possessed the political acuity to know when political maneuvering was occurring. Previous academy administrators, especially the men, used favors to complete the work of the academy. It was thus initially difficult for me, a woman who was also an outsider, to change that culture. And, fortunately, experience provided understanding of politics. Based on my personal experiences and the stories shared by the women who participated in this study, females aspiring to the superintendency, mentoring may prove to be a key to reducing the challenge of political leadership for females aspiring to the superintendency.

Conclusion

For female superintendents, political leadership is a dynamic proactive process to move forward the district vision. The process requires establishing relationships through two-way communication, capitalizing on referent power, making wise decisions, and building trust through relationships. The superintendent connects the district to internal and external resources, and thus a female superintendent serves both on a local and state level as a political leader. Experienced female superintendents are political leaders who serve outside previous established norms. The role models that these experienced female superintendents provide should help women who will follow in their footsteps.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Experienced Kentucky Female Superintendent Perceptions of Political Leadership
Recruitment Email and/or Phone Call Script for interviews

Superintendent _____,

I am Karen Thomas McNay, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership Studies at the University of Kentucky. Thank you for participating in the questionnaire concerning female superintendent perceptions of political leadership. Your input is invaluable for this study. You are receiving this correspondence because you expressed a willingness to participate in the interview phase of this research study.

Participation in the research will remain confidential, thus your name and other identifying information will not be included in the report. Attached you will find a consent form concerning the interview phase of the research. Please read through the consent form and ask any questions, or concerns. The PI may be reached at the phone number or email below.

During the interview phase you will complete two one-hour phone call or face to face audio taped interviews scheduled at your convenience.

The interviews will allow you to share your experiences and elaborate on your decision making and leadership style along with your connection to others in your district. Interview questions seek your experiences and perceptions, which will provide invaluable information for the study.

Today, I would like to schedule your first interview. Please send me dates you may be available for the interview.

If you have any questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact me via telephone at 859-771-0010 or email Kkirb2@g.uky.edu.

Thank you for your participation. I look forward to your interview.

Karen Thomas McNay
Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Leadership Studies
University of Kentucky
Email: Kkirb2@g.uky.edu
Phone: 859-771-0010

APPENDIX B

ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

You are invited to take part in a research study about female superintendent perceptions of political leadership. You are asked to take part because you currently serve as a female superintendent in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. If you volunteer to take part in the research you will be one of 33 superintendents to do so.

The person in charge of this study, also known as the Principal Investigator (PI) is Karen Thomas McNay, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership Studies at the University of Kentucky. Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno is her advisor in this research.

The purpose of this study is to gain greater understanding of female superintendents' experiences in working with internal and external constituents, and with their networking and mentoring experiences. The goal of this research is to learn more about components of political leadership to aid aspiring as well as current superintendents in developing leadership skills.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you may participate in an online questionnaire and interviews. You will be asked to complete a short 15 minute online questionnaire through a private account maintained with SurveyMonkey. Some questionnaire participants will be invited to participate in data collection through two face-to-face interviews. If chosen to continue in the research, you will be invited to complete two one-hour face-to-face interviews with the Principal Investigator at a location and time convenient to you. The interview's purpose will allow you to share your experiences, to elaborate on your leadership style, vision, and relationships with others. Questions truly seek your experiences and perceptions, which will provide invaluable information for the study.

The things you will be doing during the study will have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced a benefit from an increase in self-awareness of themselves and their leadership style.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. You will not be personally identified in these written materials; all identifying information will remain private.

We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. We may be required to show information which identifies you to people who need to be sure we have done the research correctly; these would be people from

such organizations as the University of Kentucky.

Participants will remain confidential, thus, your name and other identifying information will not be included in the report.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

Please be aware, while we make every effort to safeguard your data once received from the online survey/data gathering company, given the nature of online surveys, as with anything involving the Internet, we can never guarantee the confidentiality of the data while still on the survey/data gathering company's servers, or while en route to either them or us. It is also possible the raw data collected for research purposes may be used for marketing or reporting purposes by the survey/data gathering company after the research is concluded, depending on the company's Terms of Service and Privacy policies.

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator Karen Thomas McNay via telephone at 859-771-0010 or email Kkirb2@g.uky.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the staff in the Office of Research Integrity at the University of Kentucky between the business hours of 8am and 5pm EST, Mon-Fri. at 859-257-9428 or toll free at 1-866-400-9428. By continuing with this questionnaire you are giving consent to participate in the survey portion of the study.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in this research.

Karen Thomas McNay
Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Leadership Studies
University of Kentucky
Email: Kkirb2@g.uky.edu
Phone: 859-771-0010

1. What is your age group?

- 31-35
- 36-40
- 41-45
- 46-50
- Over 50

2. How do you identify yourself?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- African American or Black
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White (not Hispanic or Latino)

Other (please specify)

3. What is the highest advanced degree that you currently hold?

- Masters (e.g., MA, MS, MEd)
- Specialist in Education (EdS)
- Doctor of Education or Doctor of Philosophy (EdD, PhD)

Other (please specify)

4. How many years have you worked in your current district as a P12 educator (e.g., teacher, teacher on special assignment outside classroom, principal, district position, superintendent)?

- This is my first year.
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 10 or more years

5. Have you worked in a district outside of where you currently serve?

- Yes
- No

6. In which Service Center Region is your district located?

- West Kentucky Educational Cooperative (WKEC)
- Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC)
- Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS)
- Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC)
- Northern Kentucky Cooperative for Educational Services (NKECS)
- Central Kentucky Educational Cooperative (CKEC)
- Southeast Southcentral Education Cooperative (SE/SC)
- Kentucky Valley Education Cooperative (KVEC)
- Kentucky Educational Development Corporation (KEDC)

7. Have you worked in education outside of Kentucky?

- Yes
- No

If "Yes", please provide state(s)

8. How many years have you served as a superintendent in your current district?

- This is my first year.
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- Over 5

9. Have you served as superintendent in another district?

- Yes
- No

10. If you responded "Yes" to Question 9, how many years were you superintendent in other district?

- 1 year
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- Over 5
- Not applicable

11. In what size district do you currently serve as superintendent?

- Larger urban district (total resident population over 250,000)
- Midsize urban district (total resident population between 100,000 and 250,000)
- Small city district (total resident population less than 100,000)
- Predominately rural district (i.e., located approximately 25 miles from an urban center)
- Remote rural district (i.e., located more than 100 miles from an urban center)

12. How many years did you serve as a full-time teacher in a P-12 school?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- More than 20

13. What positions as a P-12 educator did you hold before becoming superintendent?

(Please select all that apply.)

- I never served as a P-12 educator prior to becoming superintendent
- Preschool Teacher
- Elementary Teacher
- Middle School Teacher
- High School Teacher
- Assistant Principal Elementary School
- Assistant Principal Middle School
- Assistant Principal High School
- Principal Elementary School
- Principal Middle School
- Principal High School
- District-level Position(e.g., Director, Supervisor)
- Assistant or Associate Superintendent

Other (please specify)

14. How many years did you serve as an assistant principal and principal?

- I never served as an assistant principal or principal
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- More than 20

15. In what type of school did you serve as a principal the longest?

- Elementary School
- Middle School/Junior High School
- High School
- I never served as principal.

16. In what size district did you serve as principal the longest?

- Larger urban district (total resident population over 250,000)
- Midsize urban district (total resident population between 100,000 and 250,000)
- Small city district (total resident population less than 100,000)
- Predominately rural district (i.e., located approximately 25 miles from an urban center)
- Remote rural district (i.e., located more than 100 miles from an urban center)
- Not applicable (I never served as a principal)

17. How many years did you serve in a district level position prior to becoming a superintendent?

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- More than 20

18. What district level positions did you hold prior to becoming a superintendent?

- Director
- Supervisor
- Assistant Superintendent
- Associate Superintendent

Other (please specify)

19. While working in a district position other than the superintendency what area(s) were you responsible for? (Please select all that apply.)

- Communication/technology
- Community Relations
- Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment/Accountability
- Finance/Budget
- Human Resources/Personnel
- Organizational Management (i.e., supervision of multiple departments or units.)
- Not Applicable

20. What position did you hold immediately prior to becoming a superintendent?

21. Prior to becoming a superintendent, did you work directly with school board members on district business?

- Yes
- No

22. In what state did you complete your superintendent preparation?

- Kentucky

Other (please specify state where you completed preparation)

23. In what year did you complete your superintendent preparation program?

- Prior to 2009
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013

24. Superintendent literature identifies five distinct roles: instructional leaders, manager, political leaders, social scientist and communicator. Please rank how you view these roles in order of importance with 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).

Instructional Leader (i.e., curriculum and instruction)

Manager (i.e., general management, finance, human resources, operations)

Political Leader (i.e. allocation of resources, board and community relations)

Communicator (i.e., listening, sharing information through multiple venues)

Applied Social Scientist (i.e., solving educational or social problems)

	1	2	3	4	5
Instructional Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied Social Scientist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. How often do you perform each of the superintendent roles?

	Daily	2 to 3 times a week	Weekly	Bimonthly	Monthly
Instructional Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied Social Scientist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Please complete the following sentence by selecting the option that applies:

I believe I am a strong...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Instructional Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied Social Scientist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. Please complete the following sentence by selecting the option that applies where

- 1= little or no experience**
- 2= minimal experience**
- 3= some experience**
- 4= many experiences**
- 5= served in role prior to becoming superintendent**

My previous positions provided experience in the following roles before serving as superintendent...

	1	2	3	4	5
Instructional Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied Social Scientist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

28. During your first year as superintendent, which of the five leadership roles was the most challenging? Why?

29. Please complete the following sentence by selecting the option that applies.

I communicate with...

	Daily	2 or 3 times a week	Weekly	Bimonthly	Monthly
District Staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building Administrators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Board Members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Board Chair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interest Groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Community Leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other Superintendents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

30. Please rate the following:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a strong network.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have mentor(s) who prepared me for the superintendency.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have mentors I call upon as superintendent.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a strong support system who encouraged me to seek leadership positions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I call other superintendents when needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

31. Please complete the following sentence by selecting the option that applies where...

- 1= never**
- 2= very little**
- 3= some**
- 4= many**
- 5= already experienced in this role**

My mentors supported me through knowledge and experiences in the following roles before serving as superintendent...

	1	2	3	4	5
Instructional Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Manager	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Political Leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communicator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied Social Scientist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thank you for completing this online questionnaire.

The second phase of this study will be two face-to-face interviews with experienced female superintendents serving in Kentucky. Karen Thomas McNay (Kkirb2@g.uky.edu), doctoral candidate at the University of Kentucky, is the principal investigator. She will be conducting the interviews at locations and times convenient to those who participate in the interviews.

You may volunteer to participate in an interview by sending an email message to Karen Thomas McNay [Email Me](#). Or you may volunteer to participate in interviews by copying and pasting this email address: Kkirb2@g.uky.edu to send an email to the principal investigator. Please insert **Volunteer for Interview** in the subject line of your email message. Karen Thomas McNay will contact you about the interview phase of the research.

Volunteering to participate in interviews will give you the opportunity to provide more information about topics addressed in this questionnaire.

Again, thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX C

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this research. Our discussion today is meant to help me understand your perceptions concerning relationships and how you lead. Please feel free to share any comments you wish. All interview data is confidential and your name and district will remain anonymous.

At the end of each interview, I will provide you with a transcription of your interview. You will be able to read and affirm, clarify or omit parts of the transcript during your check of data.

Guiding Question: *How do female superintendents foster relationships and use power to influence others?*

1. Tell me about your journey to the superintendency.
2. Why did you pursue the superintendency?
3. Tell me about the community you serve.
4. Tell me about the various constituencies you serve?
5. In what ways do you interact or communicate with community groups?
 - How did you establish relationships with community groups?
 - Which groups do you often communicate with?
6. In what ways do you interact or communicate with internal employees?
 - How did you establish relationships with internal employees?
 - Which employees do you communicate with most often?
7. In what ways do you have interact and communicate with building level administrators? How did you establish relationships with administrators?
8. In what ways do you interact or communicate with school board members? How did you establish relationships with school board members?
9. What is most important to you about these relationships? Why?
10. Do relationships inform your leadership or decisions? How do your relationships inform your leadership or decisions?
11. Do any relationships result in conflicts or differences of opinion? Do you work to resolve or negotiate conflicts? If so, how do you negotiate conflicts?
12. From whom do you seek input from or communicate with when making major decisions? (response) Are those the same individuals who you seek input from or communicate with most often?
13. Many people perceive that the superintendent has power or control over everything in the district. Is that a widely held perception in your district? Please explain.
14. How do you perceive your role in terms of power? Are you able to enact that perception? Please explain why.
15. Do you believe you influence others? How do you influence others?

APPENDIX D

SECOND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this research. Our discussion today is meant to better understand how female superintendents make decisions, navigate conflict, and lead. Please feel free to share any comments you wish. All interview data is confidential and your name and district will remain anonymous.

At the end of this interview, I will provide you with a transcript of your interview. You will be able to read and affirm, clarify or omit parts of the transcript during your check of data.

Guiding Question: *What behaviors do female superintendents engage in or implement as political leaders?*

1. After reading through the transcription of our first interview, are there any comments you want to clarify or share with me?
2. According to the literature on the superintendency, there are five broad roles: instructional leader, manager, social scientist, communicator, and political leader. How do you define the role of political leadership as a superintendent?
3. Do you believe you are a political leader? Please explain.
4. Has your perception of political leadership changed since you first became superintendent? If yes, how has it changed?
5. Looking back on your first year as superintendent were you prepared for the aspects of political leadership? Please explain?
6. In the Kentucky female superintendent survey, when female superintendent were asked about the role they felt least prepared for 85% responded political leader. Do you agree? In what ways could females be better prepared for this role?
7. Please give an example of your political leadership.
8. Do you believe political leadership relates to the communication and relationships we spoke of in the first interview? Please explain.
9. Limited financial resources have impacted public education in recent years. Often, limited resources mean that a district cannot provide the same services as in the past. When facing this dilemma, how do you make decisions concerning which district needs are addressed?
10. Are there times you use political leadership when allocating limited resources? If so, how?
11. At times, does the allocation of resources result in conflict? If so, how do you use political leadership to navigate the conflict?
12. Today, I would like to hear about your vision for your district and decision making. Superintendents often have a vision for the district, tell me about your vision for the district.
13. How was the district's vision statement created? How do you see support for the district vision by others? Does the district vision statement differ from your vision for the district? Please explain.

14. Are there individuals or groups that do not support the district vision? Please explain. How do you deal with disagreements or conflicts from differing opinions?
15. Did you enact political leadership while developing the district vision? If so, how? How do you use political leadership when making major decisions?
16. Are there any other things you would like to share about the topics we have discussed?

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Education.

VITA

Karen Thomas McNay

Rank I. Supervision and Administration, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.
Principal Certification.

Masters of Education, Teaching and Montessori Education. Xavier University.
Cincinnati, OH. Teaching Certification and Montessori Certification. Final Paper: *A
Question of Choice*. May, 2000.

Bachelor of Science. Accounting. University of Kentucky. Lexington, KY. December,
1985.

CERTIFICATIONS

Kentucky Superintendent Certification

Kentucky Principal Certification

Kentucky Teaching Certification: Kindergarten-Grade 4, Grade 5-6 Self-contained
Classroom

American Montessori Certification Three to Six year olds

TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATION EXPERIENCE

2013-current President of Ursuline Academy of New Orleans

2005-2013 Principal of Christ the King School, Lexington, KY.

1999-2005 Kindergarten Teacher, The Lexington School
Kinderklasse Teacher, The Lexington School
Montessori Teacher, The Lexington School

HONORS AND AWARDS

City Business One's to Watch in Education, New Orleans, LA (2014)

Distinguished Alumni of Hardin County Schools, Kentucky (2013)

Leadership Institute for School Principals, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, 2011-2012

PUBLICATIONS

Kirby, K. T. (2003, Spring). A question of choice. *Montessori Life*, 15 (2). Retrieved from www.questia.com/magazine/1P3-342998231/a-question-of-choice

PRESENTATIONS

Thomas, K. (2012, June) *Continuous improvement through accreditation*. Paper presented at the International Symposium on Educational Reform, Lexington, KY.

Thomas, K. (2012, Spring) *Teacher evaluation, A guide for principals*. Presentation at the Diocese of Lexington Principal Retreat, Richmond, KY.

Thomas, K. (2012, Spring). *Principal panel, student teacher seminar*. Invited panelist at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY.

Thomas, K. (2011, Spring). *Principal panel, student teacher seminar*. Invited panelist at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY.

Thomas, K. (2010, Spring). *Principal panel, student teacher seminar*. Invited panelist at Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY.

Kirby, K. T. (2003, Fall). *SI tips for teachers*. Lecture at National Association for the Education of Young Children Conference, Chicago, IL.

Kirby, K. T. (2002, Fall). *Sensory integration and the child*. Lecture at Kentucky Association for Independent Schools, Lexington, KY.

Kirby, K. T.(2003, Fall). *Sensory integration and the child*. Lecture at the National Association for the Education of Young Children conference, New York, NY.