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Theodore J. Kowalski

University of Dayton, tkowalski1@udayton.edu

C. Cryss Brunner

University of Minnesota

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The School Superintendent

Roles, Challenges, and Issues

THEODORE J. KOWALSKI

University of Dayton

C. CRYSS BRUNNER

University of Minnesota

The purposes of this chapter are to detail the development of the office of school superintendent, to examine issues of gender and race, to identify contemporary issues affecting practice, and to identify future research topics. The first two sections provide historical perspectives summarizing how the position has evolved over the past 150 years at three different levels—state, intermediate district, and local district. A discussion of the position's history produces five role conceptualizations; having evolved over the past 150 years, these characterizations provide a mosaic of contemporary expectations. Next, considerable attention is given to the causes and implications of race and gender underrepresentation, and research on this topic is summarized. Contemporary challenges to practice are then presented in relation to education finance, school reform, social contexts of

schooling, and school board relationships. Last, suggestions for conducting research on the normative and actual roles, underrepresentation, and contemporary challenges are provided.

HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDENT

State and Intermediate District Superintendents

Although the term *school superintendent* is most readily associated with local districts, the position also exists at two other levels of authority having jurisdiction over public education. One of them is the state government. The first state superintendent, appointed in New York in 1812, had three primary duties: plan a common school system for the state, report on the management of public funds, and provide school-related information to the

state legislature. Over the next 40 years, every northern state and some southern states followed New York's lead in creating such a position (Butts & Cremin, 1953).

The creation of state departments was spawned by tensions between two basic and seemingly contradictory values, liberty and equality. The concept of local control, unique to the United States, is an expression of liberty; the intent was to allow residents of local school districts to participate in public school governance by influencing budget, curriculum, and personnel decisions. By the 1830s, however, state officials began to recognize that disparate educational opportunities existed among local schools. This perceived problem prompted them to embrace the common school concept. Spring (1994) identified this movement's three primary objectives as educating all children in a common schoolhouse, using schools as an instrument of government policy, and creating state agencies to control local schools.

Today, state-level superintendents are found in all 50 states.¹ While the overall responsibility of this position is to oversee education from a statewide perspective, the titles² and conditions surrounding the job certainly are not uniform. Variability exists in the following areas: method of selection (appointed versus elected); relationship to the state board of education (nonmember, nonvoting member, member, or chair); authority over the state board of education (high, moderate, or low); and required, desired, and actual qualifications (professional educators or noneducators). Despite such fundamental differences, the position of state superintendent focuses on several common purposes reflected in the activities of the Council of Chief State School Officers. This organization is composed of public officials who oversee elementary and secondary education in the states, U.S. extrastate jurisdictions (American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands), the District of

Columbia, and the Department of Defense's education activities. The council's mission is divided into four general activities: strategic partnerships and advocacy, professional development and capacity building, school performance and student achievement, and data collection, research, and technical assistance.

At a later time, most states established county-level agencies to act as liaisons between communities and state government. The executive officer of these units was commonly given the title of county superintendent. One of the responsibilities assigned to this position was to provide service and management to weak districts (Knezevich, 1971). Each state, however, has a somewhat unique history in the development of county-level districts (Campbell, Cunningham, Nystrand, & Usdan, 1990), partly because the number and size of local districts vary markedly across states. Some states, especially in the South, did not decentralize below the county level; by comparison, some states established separate school districts in virtually every town and township. Eventually, population increases and school consolidation reduced the number of small local districts, and the necessity of retaining a county-level agency in every county was challenged in some states. Typically, this scrutiny resulted in legislation that retained the concept but reduced the number of such agencies. Michigan and Illinois are two states that exemplify this type of reduction. Michigan's current 57 intermediate school districts were formed in 1962 when the state's 83 county school districts were reduced and renamed by state statute. A similar state law was passed in Illinois circa 1970. County-level education agencies were replaced by regional service centers while counties without sufficient population were forced to merge with neighboring counties.

These middle-level education agencies are frequently confederations, organizations in which the members have substantial control over the scope of activities (Knezevich, 1984). This control is exercised by virtue of a

governance board composed of the local district superintendents or their designees. Differences across states exist in the following areas:

Funding. States differ with respect to how they fund these units. Typically, operating funds are a mix of state support and member district fees. In some states, these units have the authority to levy a local property tax.

Services. Middle-level units do not provide the same services across states. The nature and scope of services usually depend on the legal nature of the unit. Those that are legal extensions of state government perform delegated administrative functions (e.g., auditing or registering educator licenses) and also may engage in selected support services (e.g., technology, staff development, cooperative purchasing). Those that are independent confederations of local districts usually focus entirely on support services.

Relationship to local districts. Middle-level units that are legal extensions of state government are more likely to have authority in selected areas over local districts. Independent confederations, by comparison, are essentially controlled by the local districts they serve.

Appointment of the superintendent. Having the unit's governance board appoint the superintendent is the norm. In several states, however, the superintendent is elected. In Illinois, for example, the regional service center superintendents are elected on a partisan ballot.

Clearly, these differences make it impossible to provide a single definition of an intermediate-level superintendent that is universally accurate (Kowalski, 2003a). Most often, however, the individuals who hold this office are former local district superintendents, and their responsibilities include leadership, management, and facilitation.

School District Superintendents

The position of school district superintendent was created in the mid-1800s; between 1837 and 1850, 13 urban districts employed a person in this role. By most accounts, the first district superintendents were appointed in Buffalo, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky. (Grieder, Pierce, & Jordan, 1969). By the end of the 19th century, most city school boards had created this position. The need to do so was affected by a myriad of conditions including the development of larger city school districts, the consolidation of rural districts, an expanded curriculum, passage of compulsory attendance laws, demands for increased accountability, and efficiency expectations (Kowalski, 2003a). Historical accounts of the evolution of this position over the past 150 years reveal some discrepancies. Petersen and Barnett (2003) attribute this variance to differences in three conditions: literature sources, interpretations of historical accounts, and analytical approaches. Whereas some scholars (e.g., Tyack & Hansot, 1982) relied on a developmental approach, based on the premise that the superintendent's role matured over time, others (Callahan, 1966) employed a discursive analysis, relying on rhetoric and writings to determine role expectations. Noting the use of these two distinctively different approaches, Brunner, Grogan, and Björk (2002) concluded that the discursive approach resulted in a greater number of developmental stages.

Some authors (e.g., Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Petersen & Barnett, 2003) identify the earliest role conceptualization of the superintendent as being the school board's clerk. This role, thought to exist for several decades prior to 1850, was predicated on the belief that big-city school boards were compelled to employ a figurehead but reluctant to relinquish power. Hence, superintendents were relegated to performing simple clerical and practical tasks (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). The role of

clerk proved to be temporary and was not sustained as the position matured; this may explain why some scholars have not included it in their writing. Five role conceptualizations are used here to discuss how the position of district superintendent has evolved since its inception. The first four were described by Callahan (1966) and the fifth by Kowalski (2001, 2003b): superintendent as teacher-scholar (1850 to early 1900s), manager (early 1900s to 1930), democratic leader (1930 to mid-1950s), applied social scientist (mid-1950s to mid-1970s), and communicator (mid-1970s to present). In practice, completely separating these five characterizations is impossible because practitioners often assume two or more of them at any time. Although all remain essential to effective practice, the importance of each varied based on social and philosophical conditions.

SUPERINTENDENT ROLE CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Superintendent as Teacher-Scholar

From the time the position was created until the first decade of the 20th century, the primary foci of district superintendents were implementing state curricula and supervising teachers. The common school movement was intended to assimilate students into American culture by having public schools deliver a set of uniform subjects and courses. This strategy required centralized control and standardization to ensure compliance at the local level, and these responsibilities were assigned to state, county, and district superintendents.

Following the Civil War, rapidly developing urban school systems and their superintendents became the models of effective practice because their organizations were larger and more modern than others. The perception of these administrators as "master" teachers was predicated on the fact that they were former classroom teachers who were effective

in classrooms (Callahan, 1962) and devoted much of their time to instructional supervision, thereby assuring uniformity of curricula (Spring, 1994). Many big-city superintendents also authored professional journal articles about philosophy, history, and pedagogy (Cuban, 1988), whereas others moved on to become state superintendents, professors, and college presidents (Petersen & Barnett, 2003). The role of superintendent as teacher-scholar was summarized in an 1890 report on urban superintendents:

It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils. (Cuban, 1976, p. 16)

In the late 1800s, teaching and administration were not viewed as separate professions. Superintendents identified themselves as members of the teaching profession, and they were the most influential members of the National Education Association. Often, these administrators used professionalism to protect themselves from powerful business and civic leaders who attempted to usurp their authority. Because they did not want to be perceived as politicians or managers, the business aspects of administration were often assumed by board members or subordinate officials (Callahan, 1966).

After 1910, the conceptualization of the district superintendent as teacher-scholar waned but did not become totally irrelevant. Over the past 100 years, expectations that superintendents should be instructional leaders have fluctuated. In recent decades, school reform initiatives and strategies heightened expectations that superintendents should provide the visionary leadership and planning necessary to produce academic gains at the school district level. Even so, policymakers

often disagree over the extent to which superintendents require preparation and experience as professional educators, as evidenced by differing state licensing standards and by the credentials of superintendents employed in the nation's largest school systems.

Superintendent as Manager

At the beginning of the 20th century, America was becoming an industrial society. Social, economic, and political changes associated with this transition affected public education in two primary ways. First, industrialization encouraged urbanization. Large cities required large public school districts, which required managers to control material and human resources. Second, the philosophical underpinnings of the Industrial Revolution were widely accepted by public officials, including those who served on the school boards of rapidly growing cities (Callahan, 1962). Both factories and schools were thought to need scientific managers, individuals who could improve operations by concentrating on time and efficiency (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

As early as 1890, reservations were expressed about the ability of traditional superintendents to administer large city districts. These concerns focused primarily on a perceived lack of managerial knowledge and skills. As Cuban (1976) noted, heated debates were waged on this topic, and "the lines of argument crystallized over whether the functions of a big-city superintendent should be separated in to two distinct jobs, i.e., business manager and superintendent of instruction" (p. 17). Such discussions were fueled by growing concerns that schools did not operate efficiently, at least not in comparison to successful businesses (Kowalski, 1999). Over the next 10 to 20 years, many leading education scholars, including Ellwood Cubberley, George Strayer, and Franklin Bobbitt, joined those advocating the adoption of scientific management in schools

(Cronin, 1973). Leading universities started offering courses in school management as many big-city superintendents tried to persuade policymakers and the general public that their work was separate from and more important than teaching (Thomas & Moran, 1992).

The primary management roles assigned to superintendents during this period included budget development and administration, standardization of operation, personnel management, and facility management. Yet, not everyone supported reshaping the superintendency into a management position. Some mayors, city council members, and other political bosses, for example, feared that the new role would increase the stature of superintendents, resulting in their acquiring more influence and power (Callahan, 1962).³ Others, including some leading education scholars during that era, were apprehensive because they saw the role transition as a manifestation of a broader threat to grassroots participative democracy. More precisely, they feared that power elites in business, government, and public education would take control of the public schools, thus eradicating the concept of local community control (Glass, 2003). Although he recognized that an intricate set of social forces played some part in the adoption of scientific management in schools, noted historian Raymond Callahan (1962) pointed the finger of blame more deliberately at big-city superintendents. He concluded that their collusion was essential to this transformation, and he referred to them as dupes—powerless and vulnerable individuals unwilling to defend either their profession or their organizations. This conclusion, referred to as the "thesis of vulnerability," was accepted by many, but not all education scholars (Eaton, 1990). Burroughs (1974) and Tyack (1974), for instance, viewed these big-city superintendents as cunning, intelligent political pragmatists who responded to the societal realities surrounding their work. Thomas and Moran (1992), by comparison, decided that these superintendents embraced

their new management role as a means of expanding their own legitimate power base.

The business executive perspective of school administration was increasingly criticized after 1930, largely for three reasons. First, the great economic stock market crash and subsequent Depression eroded much of the glitter captains of industry acquired by deploying scientific management during the previous three decades. Second, many local school district patrons began objecting to a perceived loss of liberty; they thought they were being excluded from the governance of their local schools (Kowalski, 2003a). Third, leading progressive educators, such as George Sylvester Counts, relentlessly criticized the infusion of business values into school administration, arguing that classical theory and scientific management were incongruous with the core values of a democratic society (Van Til, 1971). Although support for the conceptualization of superintendent as business executive diminished, the realization that management functions were essential became embedded in the culture of the education profession. Educators and policymakers became more accepting of the premise that effective administrators had to be both managers and leaders; the goal was not to eradicate management but rather to place it in its proper perspective (Kowalski, 1999).

Superintendent as Democratic Leader

The role of democratic leader is often equated with statesmanship. Björk and Gurley (2003) traced the origins of statesmanship from Plato to Alexander Hamilton. Plato believed that a statesman acted unilaterally and paternalistically to control and direct critical societal functions. Hamilton viewed a statesman as a true politician who juggled the interests of the common people and the interests of the economic elite while remaining an aristocrat. Callahan's (1966) conception of the superintendent as statesman was probably

not in total agreement with either of these perspectives, as his historical analysis of the period between 1930 and the mid-1950s appears to have been centered primarily on political leadership in a truly democratic context. After studying these perspectives, Björk and Gurley concluded that the term *statesman* "is not and may never have been an appropriate role conceptualization for the American superintendency, inasmuch as the role has never been about a stately, patriarch ubiquitously and benevolently guiding school systems single-handedly" (p. 35). Instead of statesman, they viewed this superintendent role as one of an astute political strategist.

The role conceptualization of superintendent as democratic leader is anchored in both political realities and philosophy. During and following the great economic Depression, resources for education were very scarce. Political activity was heightened as schools competed with other public services and with each other to secure financial support. Prior to this time, political involvement by superintendents was often deemed inappropriate and unprofessional (Björk & Lindle, 2001; Kowalski, 1995). However, in the highly turbulent environment of the 1930s, these convictions faded and were replaced by expectations that school administrators could function as lobbyists and political strategists. Simultaneously, critics of the preceding management era were still waging a battle to restore democracy in school districts that had become bureaucratic. A leading spokesperson for democratic administration was Ernest Melby, a former dean of education at Northwestern University and New York University (Callahan, 1966). Melby (1955) believed that the community was public education's greater resource, urging administrators to "release the creative capacities of individuals" and "mobilize the educational resources of communities" (p. 250). In essence, superintendents were urged to galvanize policymakers, employees,

and other taxpayers to support a board's initiatives (Howlett, 1993).

By the mid-1950s, the idea of having superintendents engage in democratic administration also met with disfavor. Detractors argued that the concept was overly idealistic and insufficiently attentive to realities of practice. The everyday problems faced by superintendents were viewed largely as economic and political, and concerns mounted that administrators were not prepared properly to meet these challenges (Kowalski, 1999).

Superintendent as Applied Social Scientist

As with earlier role conceptualizations, the view of superintendent as applied social scientist was forged by several societal and professional conditions. Callahan (1966) noted four:

- Growing dissatisfaction with democratic leadership after World War II; critics charged that the concept was overly idealistic and ignored the realities of practice
- Rapid development of the social sciences in the late 1940s and early 1950s; much of the knowledge generated by this expansion was applicable to public organizations and administration (Callahan, 1966)
- Support from the Kellogg Foundation; during the 1950s, the foundation provided more than \$7 million in grants, primarily to eight major universities that allowed school administration professors to conduct social science research
- A resurgence of criticisms of public education in the early 1950s; much like conditions leading to the management conceptualization, public dissatisfaction spawned reform efforts and heightened interest in the social sciences

At least two other factors were highly influential. Circa 1955, efforts to make school administration an established academic discipline equal to business management and public administration were intensifying (Culbertson, 1981). Redefining administrators as applied social scientists and infusing the social sciences into the curriculum for preparing school

administrators were viewed as positive steps toward that goal (Crowson & McPherson, 1987). Second, prior to the 1950s, the practice of school administration focused largely on internal operations, but gradually, systems theory was employed to demonstrate how external legal, political, social, and economic systems affected the operation and productivity of public schools (Getzels, 1977). Consequently, administrators had to understand these external systems if they were to provide essential leadership and management.

The model of superintendent as social scientist encouraged professors and practitioners to emphasize empiricism, predictability, and scientific certainty in their research and practice (Cooper & Boyd, 1987). The intent was to rewrite the normative standards for practice; superintendents in the future were expected to apply scientific inquiry to the problems and decisions that permeated their practice. The study of theory was at the core of this normative transition, as evidenced by the changes in school administration textbooks. Textbooks written prior to 1950 never mentioned theory; virtually none written after 1950 omitted theory (Getzels, 1977).

In many ways, the development of the applied social scientist perspective paralleled the earlier development of the management perspective. Both changes occurred in the context of public dissatisfaction; both arguably benefited professors who prepared practitioners by elevating the status of their profession; and both separated administration from teaching, with administrators being viewed as having more demanding and more technical positions (Kowalski, 2003a).

Both management and social science cast superintendents as "experts" who possessed a knowledge base beyond teaching. More recently, the applied social scientist view captured the attention of critical theorists because knowledge associated with this role is highly cogent to eradicating social injustices in public institutions (Johnson & Fusarelli, 2003).

Superintendent as Communicator

The view of superintendent as communicator emerged in conjunction with America's transition from a manufacturing to an information society (Kowalski, 2001). Communicative expectations in this position reflect a confluence of reform initiatives and the social environment in which they are being pursued. Virtually every major school improvement concept and strategy encourages administrators to work collaboratively with teachers, parents, and taxpayers to build and pursue a collective vision. Yet, many schools retain cultures that promote work isolation as teachers and administrators work individually and in seclusion (Gideon, 2002) and in closed organizational climates where administrators attempt to avoid community interventions (Blase & Anderson, 1995).

Since the early 1990s, most policy analysts concluded that meaningful school reform requires revising institutional climates, including organizational structure and culture (Bauman, 1996). In addition, current reform efforts are largely predicated on the conviction that restructuring complex institutions necessitates a social systems perspective (Chance & Björk, 2004; Murphy, 1991; Schein, 1996). "Systemic thinking requires us to accept that the way social systems are put together has independent effects on the way people behave, what they learn, and how they learn what they learn" (Schlechty, 1997, p. 134). In this vein, the nature of public schools is influenced by human transactions occurring within and outside the formal organization, exchanges that are often driven by philosophical differences. Restructuring proposals that ignore the ubiquitous nature of political disagreements in public schools almost always fail, either because key implementers and stakeholders are excluded from visioning and planning or because the values and beliefs expressed in the reforms are incongruous with prevailing institutional culture (Schlechty, 1997).

Many scholars (e.g., Henkin, 1993; Murphy, 1994) believe that school improvement needs to be pursued locally and that superintendents must be key figures in the process. This assignment, however, is highly intimidating. Superintendents must openly discuss topics with stakeholders, topics that inevitably produce substantial conflict (Carlson, 1996), and they must assume assignments for which they have no or minimal preparation (Kowalski, 2003b). Most have become dubious about reform, having experienced a myriad of change failures during their careers (Sarason, 1996). Within existing school cultures, even new teachers and administrators often come to accept things as they are (Streitmatter, 1994).

Clearly, then, school restructuring is an especially intricate assignment because it usually requires long-standing values and beliefs to be identified, challenged, and changed. Institutional culture is central to school restructuring because it determines what individuals and groups truly believe and value about education (Trimble, 1996) and how they promote and accept change (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Fernandez, 1994). Many communication scholars concluded that communication and culture are inextricably linked. For example, Conrad (1994) wrote, "Cultures are communicative creations. They emerge and are sustained by the communicative acts of all employees, not just the conscious persuasive strategies of upper management. Cultures do not exist separately from people communicating with one another" (p. 27). Despite the fact that most organizational research categorized culture as a causal variable and communication as an intervening variable (Wert-Gray, Center, Brashers, & Meyers, 1991), scholars often describe the relationship between the two as reciprocal. Axley (1996), for instance, characterized this interdependence: "Communication gives rise to culture, which gives rise to communication, which

perpetuates culture" (p. 153). As such, communication is a process through which organizational members express their collective inclination to coordinate beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes; in schools, communication gives meaning to work and forges perceptions of reality. Furthermore, culture influences communicative behavior, and communicative behavior is instrumental to building, maintaining, and changing culture (Kowalski, 1998). In the case of local districts, normative communicative behavior for superintendents is shaped largely by two realities: their need to assume leadership in the process of school restructuring (Björk, 2001; Murphy, 1994) and their need to change school culture as part of the restructuring process (Heckman, 1993; Kowalski, 2000).

Unfortunately, there is a disjunction between professional preparation and practice in the area of communication. As an example, communication skills are listed in standards for practice (e.g., standards developed by the American Association of School Administrators and standards used by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium) and routinely cited as required qualifications for superintendent vacancies. Yet, most administrators never complete a graduate-level course in communication. A nexus between effective practice and communication skills is not unique to education; recent studies of business executives revealed that most who were under attack were ineffective communicators (Perina, 2002). Communication has become especially important with respect to school improvement, open political dialogue, school district imaging, community support for change, information management, marketing programs, and human relations (Kowalski, 2004). Unquestionably, the ability of top-level administrators to access and use information to identify and solve problems encountered by their organizations is a primary criterion for evaluating effectiveness.

THE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY: WOMEN AND PERSONS OF COLOR

In a chapter on the superintendency, it may strike the reader as odd to find a section on women and persons of color. People tend to believe that if men and women and persons of color are superintendents, then information on the superintendency applies to, and is related to, all of them. Such a belief is understandable, but it is not grounded in reality. Consider: Demographics alone establish that the school superintendency is a white man's position. In fact, white men have held 86% to 99% of all superintendencies, with the 99% figure occurring in 1980 (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2003; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000), since the position was first created in the early 1800s (Butts & Cremin, 1953).

In terms of its representative nature, it can be said without equivocation that the superintendency represents white men. In national studies with aggregate findings from representative samples, the responses of white men dominate the conclusions so heavily that the responses of women and persons of color are virtually lost (Brunner, 2003). As Tallerico (1999) stated, "Of the approximately seventy-five years worth of extant scholarship relevant to the superintendency, most studies have either relied primarily on white, male samples, or have made no mention of the gender, racial, or ethnic backgrounds of their subjects" (p. 29). To be sure, only within the last 20 years have research and attention pointed specifically to women superintendents and superintendents of color. Without focused studies of women and superintendents of color, both groups may continue to lack appropriate and accessible role models; to believe themselves substandard because they do not fit the norms found in leadership and superintendency literature based on studies dominated by white men; to find themselves practicing in ways not mentioned in books on the superintendency; and indeed, to experience limited access to

superintendency positions because criteria for hiring are based on white male norms.

To draw attention to the unique history of how women and persons of color have come to the superintendency, to establish that the norms grounded primarily in studies of white men do not necessarily fit women and persons of color, and to add additional perspectives and value to the superintendency and leadership literature, this section focuses on these two groups. The first part draws attention to historical patterns that created personal and professional space for women and persons of color in education. The second part follows the feminization of the teaching profession, which opened the doors for persons of color, and the third part describes the masculine nature of the superintendency. The last part poses the possibility that the superintendency is becoming feminized, a possibility that may create greater access and opportunity for women and persons of color.

Educational Settings for White Males Only

That women and persons of color would eventually be heads of school districts could not have been predicted during early America's colonial period; such a prediction could not have been made about persons of color as late as the 19th century. Beginning with religious teachings, the schooling of white male children was conducted almost exclusively by literate white men in communities. Women, girls, and persons of color of all ages were socialized to respect and rely on white men's authority and wisdom, and therefore, it was thought that the three groups had no need of education. This statement is not meant to imply that covert education was nonexistent. For example, Jackson (1999) reminds us, "We now know that even during slavery, black women had the courage to defy the law and teach slaves to read. They knew

that the very survival of their race depended on education" (p. 147). Thus, even as teaching became a differentiated role, white men, not women or persons of color, offered their "for pay" services to families who could afford them (Blount, 1998).

As early as the mid-17th century, Massachusetts passed laws requiring parents to ensure the education of their children. The gradually increasing demand for schooling in turn required more schoolmasters, a post that was viewed as unattractive or as a temporary position by most qualified white men (Waller, 1932). Yet, even as communities struggled to hire schoolmasters, they remained reluctant to hire women and persons of color for at least three reasons: White women were thought to be less intelligent than white men; because white women received little, if any formal schooling, they were not prepared to teach others (Blount, 1998); and persons of color were not considered at all, as historical evidence of their role in and experience of education is scarce as late as the mid-20th century (Jackson, 1999). On learning about historical attitudes toward women as teachers and toward persons of color generally speaking, one wonders how any ever became superintendents.

An Opportunity by Default: The Feminization of the Teaching Profession

At the same time that the demand for white male schoolmasters increased, there were noteworthy supporters, feminists of the time, of formal education for women, Abigail Adams for one (Blount, 1998). Catharine Beecher's promotion of women teachers was particularly effective because she argued that women should have dominion over the domestic sphere and any extension of the home, such as the education of children. Beecher believed that women made natural teachers (Blount, 1998; Griboskov, 1980). Her beliefs were later endorsed by

Horace Mann as he worked to address an impending teacher shortage. Furthermore, according to Blount, Benjamin Rush

provided generally accepted rhetoric justifying education for females; women should receive education for the benefit of their sons, and by extension, the republic. Consequently, Rush's ideology of republican motherhood failed to challenge existing gender roles and relations deeply, perhaps a requirement for its acceptance at the time. (Blount, 1998, p. 13)

This ideology successfully rationalized and generated unprecedented formal education opportunities in seminaries, academies, and colleges for white women from 1790 to 1850 (Blount, 1998). History records almost nothing about persons of color during this time period.

During times when qualified white men found teaching less than appealing and numbers of primarily white women were educated for the benefit of their sons, women began schooling children, first in the home, next in dame schools, and eventually in local schools when men were unavailable. Persons of color provided their own teaching when and where they could outside the lives of whites (Jackson, 1999). Partially because of capable women teachers and activists like Emma Willard and Catharine Beecher, by the early 19th century, single and married white women slowly became acceptable sights in public schoolrooms across the nation.

For these and other reasons, including the fact that women's lack of work opportunities made them willing to take low wages, acceptance of women in teaching jobs grew, until in 1900 they accounted for about 70% of all teachers. After the Civil War, while most teachers were white, "Black men and women rapidly entered teaching, especially in schools built for Black children throughout the South. By 1900, as many as 20 percent of women teachers in the South were Black" (Blount, 1998, p. 37). Over a century later, women of all colors still significantly dominate the teaching

ranks, so much so that the profession is considered a feminized one, "feminized in that women constitute [a large] proportion of the teaching ranks, but also feminized in the sense that the work . . . fit[s] traditional notions of women's work" (Blount, 1998, p. 21).

The brief history provided here spans the years from the beginning of our nation to 1900. In summary, we purposely highlight the following points. First, only literate white men were teachers at the outset of the period. Women and persons of color, who were thought to be of lower intelligence than white men, were not educated. Teaching was a white and masculine occupation. Second, demand increased for teachers at the same time white, educated men were finding schoolhouse jobs too unsavory to do for long, if at all.⁴ Third, advocates of women's education, the earliest of whom were feminists, justified it by suggesting that women should be teaching their sons. Indeed, such work was touted to be an extension of women's work at home. Fourth, because influential white men became convinced that educated women were the appropriate teachers of their sons, white women increasingly had opportunities to be educated. Once educated, some women were hired, usually when white men were unavailable. In addition, because teaching was the first public profession for women, they were willing to accept low wages to experience the benefits of financial independence. After the Civil War, African Americans moved into teaching jobs, primarily in the South.

By 1900, with 70% of teachers being women and 20% being women of color, the role was considered feminized. Being feminized meant that teaching was considered primarily women's work; it was a fairly low status role, making it also open to persons of color in the South; and wages remained relatively low. Although numerous historical elements are missing from this simplified story, these highlights help us catch sight of the feminization of a professional role.

The Superintendency: A Masculine Position

While teaching became feminized, administrative roles were masculinized. This point was painstakingly documented in historian Jackie Blount's (1998) *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873–1995*. For the purposes of this chapter, suffice it to say that not all men left teaching, and those who remained felt pressure to maintain their masculinity. Along with others, Blount (1998) maintained

that it was not coincidental that teachers' independence and decision-making powers were stripped away just as women dominated the profession numerically. The male educators who remained had to assert their masculine qualities somehow, thus many became administrators to control the labors of women just as fathers and husbands long had done in the home. Administrators did not appear in significant numbers until women began filling teaching positions. (p. 27)

Although white men have dominated administrative roles since their creation, women's presence as teachers assisted in their occasional transfers into administrative ranks (Shakeshaft, 1999). Once in teaching positions, white women activists slowly convinced individual state governments and state and national organizations headed by men (Reid, 1982) that women deserved to vote for school officials because they owned property and had the right, along with the men who taught and who could vote, to decide which school officials would determine their working conditions (Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1999). Blount reminds us that by "1910, twenty-four states had granted women school suffrage" (p. 66). Regarding the importance of suffrage for women's entry into administration, Blount (1998) wrote,

The women's suffrage movement had sparked the emergence of women school administrators for at least two reasons. First, the quest for women's rights had triggered the larger movement of organized women's groups,

many of which actively supported the candidacy of women for school offices. Second, suffrage had given women power at the ballot box, which allowed them to affect the political process directly, to become, as some had hoped, a political constituency. (p. 81)

At the beginning of the 20th century, thousands of white women moved into school leadership positions, including the superintendency (Hansot & Tyack, 1981). Somewhat surprisingly, by 1930, 11% of all superintendents were women, with most having jobs at the county level (Blount, 1998). The percentage, however, began to plummet after the end of World War II as the women's movement lost its intensity and masses of men returned to postwar life and sought work in educational administration (Shakeshaft, 1989). By 1970, the proportion of women in the superintendency dropped to 3% and then declined even further in 1980 to about 1%. Not until the end of the 20th century did the proportion of women superintendents again increase to about 14% of all superintendencies (Brunner & Grogan, 2003; Glass et al., 2000). Over the course of one century, the numbers of women in the superintendency increased only 5%. In no small measure, the superintendency stubbornly remained a masculine role.

The story of superintendents of color is even more dismal. In fact, superintendents of color were practically nonexistent before the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of 1954. To be sure, there were notable exceptions. For example, Revere (1985) describes one African American woman, Velma Ashley, who served as superintendent in Oklahoma from 1944 to 1956. Three other African American women assumed superintendencies by the early 1970s (Blount, 1998; Jackson, 1999; Revere, 1985). In addition, a "black superintendent, Alonzo Crim, was appointed [in Atlanta] in 1972 as a condition of the court order [*Brown v. BOE*], demonstrating the expanding role of the court in school decisions. . . . Little was done, however,

to desegregate the Atlanta schools until extensive court litigation forced action in the 1970s" (Jackson, 1995, p. 18).

The terse history in the preceding paragraph was a strong predictor of the numbers of superintendents of color as late as the 1970s. These numbers increased slightly over the decades following. In 1981–1982, about 2.2% of superintendents were persons of color, and by 1998, 5% of all superintendencies were filled by persons of color (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). This percentage remained the same at the beginning of the 21st century (Glass et al., 2000). In no small measure, the current superintendency remains a position filled primarily by white men.

A DEARTH OF RESEARCH

In alignment with the sparse numbers of women and persons of color in the superintendency, the research on these aggregate groups has been missing, limited, and at times invisible. Also in keeping with the actual numbers of women and persons of color, research studies focused on women superintendents have outnumbered studies of superintendents of color. This section briefly discusses some of the literature on superintendents of color and then some of the slightly more extensive literature focused on women superintendents. Neither discussion should be considered a review of the literature. Rather, the intent of this section is to provide a sense of these literature sets for the reader.

Superintendents of Color: A Sampling of Literature

Although most historical and other data on superintendents of color have tended to focus on African Americans (see for example: Alston, 1999; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Jackson, 1995, 1999; Lomotey, Allen, Mark, & Rivers, 1996; Murtadha-Watts, 2000; Revere, 1985; Sizemore, 1986), a few researchers studied

Hispanics in the role (see, e.g., Mendez-Morse, 1999, 2000; Ortiz, 1999, 2000; Ortiz & Ortiz, 1995) while others wrote more broadly about women superintendents of color (Arnez, 1982; Chase, 1995; Enomoto, Gardiner, & Grogan, 2000; Ortiz, 1982).

In general, early reports about superintendents of color are sparse, as the general population of the superintendency was often not disaggregated by race. Rare data reported that superintendents of color were predominantly employed in segregated black districts in southern states. A later report by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) (Montenegro, 1993), *Women and Racial Minority Representation in School Administration*, revealed that superintendents of different racial backgrounds tended to serve in areas where people of the same race lived in significant numbers (Glass et al., 2000). This trend continues currently. Indeed, in the year 2000, in districts with enrollments of more than 25,000 students, 23% were superintendents of color (Glass et al., 2000). Table 7.1 shows the percentages and total numbers of superintendents within categories of ethnicity in the AASA study (which made use of representative sampling) (Glass et al., 2000, p. 104).

The AASA study (Glass et al., 2000) found some noteworthy differences between superintendents of color, men and women, and white superintendents, men and women. Examples include the following:

- 75% of superintendents of color have been in superintendencies for 9 or fewer years whereas 57.5% of white superintendents have been in their positions for 9 or fewer years.
- Twice as many superintendents of color (29.3% versus 13.1% of white superintendents) lived in large cities prior to college.
- Twice as many white superintendents (33.2% versus 17.5% of superintendents of color) considered themselves conservatives.
- In contrast to 10% of white superintendents, 47% of superintendents of color reported that discriminatory hiring and promotional practices limited career opportunities.

Table 7.1 Ethnicity by Gender

Race	Gender			
	Men		Women	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Black	38	2.0	15	5.1
White	1,833	95.3	272	91.5
Hispanic	27	1.4	4	1.3
Native American	15	0.8	2	0.7
Asian	3	0.2	2	0.7
Other	9	0.5	2	0.7
Total	1,947	100.0	297	100.0

SOURCE: Glass, T. E., Björk, L. G., & Brunner, C. C. *The Study of the American School Superintendent: A Look at the Superintendent of Education in the New Millennium*. © 2000 by American Association of School Administrators. Reprinted by permission of American Association of School Administrators.

- Whereas 41% of white superintendents reported that they were hired because of personal characteristics, 42% of superintendents of color reported that they were hired because of their potential to be change agents.
- About twice as many white superintendents (44% versus 29% of superintendents of color) believed that superintendents set policy.

As can be seen by this brief display of data, gaps exist between the perceptions of superintendents of color and those of white superintendents. This gap has been reported in other studies as well (see, e.g., Glass, 1992; Gleaves-Hirsch, 1997; Tallerico, 2000a, 2000b). As Tallerico (2000a) stated, "It's clear that the historically disenfranchised see things differently from the historically privileged" (p. 139).

Women Superintendents: Literature in Brief⁵

A little more than 20 years ago, a handful of researchers, primarily women, began to focus on women in administration (see, e.g., Adler, Laney, & Packer, 1993; Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995; Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; Ortiz, 1982; Schmuck, 1975; Shakeshaft, 1989) and even later to study women in the superintendency (Bell, 1995; Brunner, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b; Chase, 1995; Chase

& Bell, 1990; Grogan, 1996; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Maienza, 1986; Marietti & Stout, 1994; Pavan, 1999; Sherman & Repa, 1994; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000; Tallerico, 2000a, 2000b; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Wesson & Grady, 1994). In addition, a few historians carefully chronicled the phenomenon of women in the superintendency (see Blount, 1998; Hansot & Tyack, 1981; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). In a review of literature on women superintendents, Tallerico (1999) conceptualized research on women in the superintendency in "terms of three inter-related and overlapping domains: profiles, patterns, and practice" (p. 30).

Tallerico (1999, p. 30) used the first domain, profiles, to refer to studies that focused on demographic characteristics and superintendents' attitudes, opinions, or perceptions on selected issues. Bell and Chase (1993), Blount (1998), Glass (1992), and Grady, Ourada-Sieb, and Wesson (1994) were a few included in this domain. The second domain, patterns, referred to examinations of career paths, mobility, and other issues related to access, mentoring, sponsorship, selection, retention, or exit. Researchers in this domain included but were not limited to Alston (1999), Beekley (1999), Brunner (1999a), Brunner and Schumaker

(1998), Chase and Bell (1990), Grogan (1996), Grogan and Henry (1995), Jackson (1999), Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999), Ortiz (1982, 1999), Ortiz and Ortiz (1993), Scherr (1995), Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993), and Tallerico and Burstyn (1996).

The third and largest domain, practice, referred to inquiry that seeks to understand the nature and experiences of superintendents' work. Researchers included in this domain were Banks (1995), Bell (1988), Chase and Bell (1990), Bell and Chase (1993, 1995, 1996), Brunner (1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c), Chase (1995), Grogan (1999), Helgesen (1990), Jackson (1999), Mendez-Morse (1999), Ortiz (1991), Ortiz and Marshall (1988), Ortiz and Ortiz (1995), Pavan (1999), Pitner (1981), Rosener (1990), Sherman and Repa (1994), and Wesson and Grady (1994, 1995).

In addition to the literature above, national studies of superintendents in recent years have disaggregated data by gender. For example, the AASA study (Glass et al., 2000) uncovered some noteworthy differences between women superintendents (all ethnicities) and men superintendents (all ethnicities). Examples include the following:

- Whereas 26.6% of men have 14 or more total years of superintendency experience, 74.9% of women have 9 or fewer total years of such experience.
- The educational background or undergraduate major for women superintendents was in education twice as often as for men (50% compared to 23.7%).
- Twice as many men superintendents (35% versus 16% of women superintendents) considered themselves conservatives.
- A greater percentage of women superintendents (57% versus 44% of men superintendents) held doctoral degrees.
- 43.8% of women superintendents held their first teaching position in elementary schools, compared to only 17% of men superintendents. The largest percentage of men superintendents (23.2%) were social studies teachers in their first teaching positions.
- More than 50% of men superintendents believed that there were no barriers for

women seeking superintendency positions other than a "lack of mobility." More than 50% of women superintendents reported numerous barriers to their access to superintendency positions, in addition to lack of mobility.

As with the data that compared superintendents of color to white superintendents, a gap exists between the perceptions of women superintendents and men superintendents. The fact that a gap exists between the perceptions of these two groups has been reported in other studies as well (see, e.g., Glass, 1992; Glass et al., 2000; Tallerico, 2000a). As with superintendents of color when compared to white superintendents, the "historically disenfranchised see things differently from the historically privileged" (Tallerico, 2000a, p. 139). Interestingly, in this particular data set, the data from and perceptions of women and persons of color are in agreement much of the time.

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS

Generalizing about problems facing superintendents is difficult for at least two reasons. First, the severity of most problems varies both within and among local school districts. For example, compliance with state mandates may be a taxing issue in a district until necessary compliance actions are completed or until a state rescinds or modifies the pertinent law. Likewise, the most critical problems identified by urban district administrators are not necessarily the same problems identified by rural administrators. Second, research questions used to obtain data on perceived problems have not always separated individual and organizational problems. What a superintendent identifies on an individual level may be substantially different from what he or she identifies on an organizational level. For these reasons, discussing problems categorically is preferable to discussing them individually. The

most enduring struggles are examined here under the following headings: fiscal support, social contexts, school reform, and school board relationships.

Fiscal Support

Superintendents often identify inadequate finances as their most pressing problem (e.g., Glass, Bjork, & Bruner, 2000). Inadequate financing is both an economic and political issue entangled in an intricate mix of adequacy and equity concerns (King, Swanson, & Sweetland, 2003). From an economic perspective, school finance focuses on the allocation of fiscal resources. For example, what portion of school funding comes from the state versus the local property tax? How often and in what manner are tax payments made to local districts? From a political perspective, the problem focuses on competition for scarce resources. That is, how much of a state's revenue is used to fund public education? Has the education lobby been competitive in securing state funds?

Policy decisions in the area of public school funding are guided by several metavalues that are widely accepted by American society. Two of them, adequacy and equity, frame the concerns that face the contemporary superintendent. Adequacy is an imprecise standard that may pertain to quality issues or quantity issues. Most often, policy addressing adequacy contains minimum standards, such as minimum revenue per pupil or the minimum expenditure per pupil. Basically, this value is expressed in the following question: How much money is necessary to provide an adequate level of schooling? Superintendents and state policymakers often have dissimilar answers, because they disagree both as to what constitutes an adequate level of education and as to the amount of money necessary to provide adequate education. Adequacy tends to be a more pervasive concern than equality among superintendents because it is cogent for

all types of districts regardless of fiscal ability (i.e., wealth as measured by taxable property per student). Equality, on the other hand, tends to be a primary concern among superintendents in districts characterized by low wealth or declining wealth (Kowalski, 1999).

Equality is often defined politically as the equal right to participate in a political system and economically as access to equal wealth (Fowler, 2004). In public education, the concept has been analyzed most often as reasonably equal opportunities. If equality were defined as a fair and just method of distributing resources among students, equality could be measured by looking at variations in revenue and spending across local districts (Crampton & Whitney, 1996). In essence, an equitable state system would produce low or moderate variation in revenue and spending among local districts. Insofar as state governments are ultimately responsible for ensuring equality, disparities in wealth and spending have resulted in litigation in nearly 90% of the states. Plaintiffs are often low-wealth districts, or residents thereof, seeking favorable revisions in state funding formulas. Despite all this litigation, the issue remains unresolved in many states. In part, this is due to the fact that the courts have defined equality in three different ways:

1. Resource accessibility: a condition achieved when average educational practice or the estimated needs of students are fully funded (Sielke, 1998)
2. Ex post fiscal neutrality: a condition achieved when the negative effects of local wealth on revenues and spending are neutralized (Thompson, Honeyman, & Stewart, 1988)
3. Ex ante fiscal neutrality: a condition achieved when there is an equal yield for equal effort (Crampton & Whitney, 1996)

The first two approaches focus on equal access and opportunities for students whereas the third focuses on equal treatment of taxpayers. In addition, courts almost always mandate state legislatures to provide remedies

to inequities. When this occurs, the decision-making process is again politicized. Even in the face of court mandates, some legislatures have refused to enact sweeping reforms. Finally, state supreme courts have often ruled that some degree of inequality is acceptable to preserve liberty, as in, for example, the authority of local school boards to make some fiscal decisions (King et al., 2003).

Clearly, financing public education is a problem, but it is especially disconcerting for superintendents who work in states with less than adequate standards for revenue and spending; in low-wealth districts in states that have not provided sufficient district equalization; and/or in districts with declining taxable property values in states where sufficient adjustments for this factor have not been adopted. Problems also arise when the number of special needs pupils is unusually high and state supplemental funding for these needs is inadequate and when enrollment increases are much greater than property value increases.

Social Contexts

The demographic profile of the typical school district today is considerably different than it was in 1950, and for the most part, the changes have made the superintendent's responsibilities more complex and demanding. Fewer taxpayers have children enrolled in the public schools; growing numbers of school-aged children are being reared in poverty; most communities have become increasingly diverse, ethnically, religiously, and culturally. At the same time that more students are entering school with emotional, physical, and psychological problems, the curriculum continues to expand. These realities, however, have not deterred some critics from demanding that superintendents do more with less (Glass, 2004).

Perhaps the most relevant social condition affecting public education has been the erosion of community life. Historically, many public schools enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with

their communities. Parents and neighborhood groups were often highly involved with or even in the schools. Today, many taxpayers know little or nothing about their local schools; some do not even know their next-door neighbors. Yet, children need strong and purposeful communities providing them human and social capital (Sergiovanni, 1994).

For the typical superintendent, the negative aspects of current social conditions get expressed in several ways. These include but are not limited to intense philosophical and political disagreements, parental apathy, lack of community involvement and support, and a growing number of at-risk students (Glass et al., 2000). In the most divided communities, superintendents are increasingly facing divided school boards.

School Reform

Over the past few decades, citizens across the entire spectrum of political persuasions have criticized public education. Most Americans fortunately continue to believe that better schools result in a better society (Tyack & Cuban, 1995), but their values and preferences affecting school reform have been less than uniform. At one end of the spectrum are those who want schools to compensate for a variety of social ills such as poverty, abuse, and dysfunctional homes; they favor increased fiscal resources, even if more funding results in a further erosion of local control. At the other end are those who view schools as being inefficient and insufficiently attentive to academic standards; they favor creating competition through concepts such as vouchers, tax credits, and charter schools (Kowalski, 1999). Such ideological differences also exist within individual districts and have the potential of polarizing communities and school boards (Keedy & Bjork, 2002).

Since about 1990, the locus of school reform has shifted from state government to local districts. This transfer has been based on observations such as these:

1. Because of philosophical and political differences, a substantial portion of the population is likely to oppose any national and state-initiated reform (Kowalski, 2001).
2. Schools are more likely to change imposed reforms than imposed reforms are likely to change schools (Cuban, 1998).
3. Educators have tended to be indifferent toward or opposed to centralized mandates that are in conflict with their values and beliefs (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991).
4. State-imposed reforms have often lacked clear objectives, were difficult to implement, and failed to achieve their goals (Madsen, 1994).

Consequently, most policymakers now accept the premise that school improvement is more feasible at the district and individual school levels. This strategic shift has made superintendents and school boards key school reform figures (Wirt & Kirst, 1997).

Many superintendents, however, are concerned that state deregulation and district decentralization have contributed to role conflict in two important ways. First, the public is being led to believe that administrators have considerable latitude to improve local schools when, in fact, state government is still highly influential in setting the reform agenda. Even as deregulation is being embraced, state legislatures are imposing higher accountability standards and setting the criteria for district evaluations. To the extent that both decentralization and evaluation involve the exercise of power, conflict between the two variables is inevitable (Weiler, 1990). Second, residents in local districts often express disparate expectations. They want visionary superintendents who can lead and be trusted while they seek superintendents who will listen to them and implement their agendas (Wirt & Kirst, 1997).

School Board Relationships

The topic of superintendent and school board relations arguably is not new. During the first half of the 20th century, problems in

this arena were often framed in terms of formal roles. That is, conflict often was observed between the policymaking role of school boards and the administrative role of superintendents (Kowalski, 1999). More recently, attention has shifted to issues such as political alignments, the use of power, and tensions between professionalism and democracy (Keedy & Bjork, 2002).

Scholars (e.g., Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970; McCarty & Ramsey, 1971) have long recognized a nexus between community power structures and school board power structures. As expected, districts with homogeneous populations have been less likely than districts with heterogeneous populations to be divided over issues such as political ideology and religious values. In the past, superintendents faced the basic question of whether to align themselves with a community's dominant power structure; today, they often face the difficult task of discerning how political power is divided within a community and how they might work effectively with all groups (Keedy & Bjork, 2002).

Arguably, superintendents and board members contribute to the tensions that surround their relationship. Many school administrators were socialized to accept bureaucratic and individualistic behaviors that inhibit them from maturing as collaborative leaders (Dunn, 2001). Often, "being in charge" remains more important than building and mobilizing support for a coherent reform plan. For these superintendents, deregulation and decentralization are threatening because legitimate authority is challenged.

Ideally, school board members are expected to be public trustees who should make objective policy decisions in the best interests of their entire communities. Yet, in reality, many of them function as political delegates, making both policy and administrative decisions on the basis of the narrower interests of their supporting political factions. Even when school board members acknowledge that their intended role is to develop policy, few are able

to agree on the nature of policy. So, rather than setting a cogent and visionary policy agenda, they react to a constant stream of problems as if they were administrators (Shibles, Rallis, & Deck, 2001).

In summary, problems surrounding superintendent and school board relations are both constant and evolving. Although the two groups have never really accepted a clear separation of policymaking and administration, they must now deal with their differences in a more politically intense environment, one that often induces reaction rather than pro-action. In this context, superintendents receive mixed messages. They are told to be bold risk takers, but they remain fearful that they will not receive support and rewards from the school board if they are (Shibles et al., 2001).

AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Much has been written about the school district superintendent over the past 100 years. Nevertheless, many aspects of this pivotal position merit further study. This is true in large measure because practice in all administrative positions is influenced substantially by context, that is, the conditions under which a practitioner applies his or her knowledge. Issues affecting education are fluid, and consequently, the parameters of effective practice are not constant.

Role Expectations

As noted earlier, superintendents not only are expected to assume at least five distinct roles, they must know when to shift emphasis from one role to another. Relatively little is known about the variables that may be associated with a practitioner's ability to do this. Likewise, relationships between context and role spawn several critical questions. For example, are certain types of districts more likely to encourage or discourage specific

roles? To what extent do superintendents seek positions that match their strengths and weaknesses with respect to role expectations?

Academic preparation, professional experience, and licensing also offer fertile ground for role research. To what extent are practitioners being adequately prepared to assume each role? Does professional experience prior to entering the superintendency enhance role competency? To what extent are states emphasizing role expectations in their licensing standards?

Gender and Race

On reviewing the history and current status of women and persons of color in the superintendency, one question comes distinctly to the fore: Are there signs that the superintendency is becoming feminized? Does the history of women teachers (white and of color) provide us with a pattern of how disadvantaged groups infiltrate and later even dominate a profession? To begin a response, one can point out several similarities between women and teaching and women and the superintendency. First, teaching, in early stages of American history, was dominated by white men, and the superintendency is dominated by white men. Second, at one time women and persons of color, for various reasons, were thought to be inappropriate candidates for teaching positions. The same is true for the superintendency. Third, an increased demand for teachers occurred at the same time that white men were finding the role less desirable. In parallel fashion, recently there has been a focused concern about the dearth of superintendency candidates (see, e.g., Anthony et al., 2000; Houston, 1998; McAdams, 1998). At the same time, men indicate that the job has less or about the same status than it once did, while women and persons of color report that it has a greater amount of status (Glass et al., 2000). Women and persons of color have also noted a greater

amount of self-fulfillment from the role than men (Glass et al., 2000).

Fourth, advocacy in the form of research and publications for women superintendents and superintendents of color now exists that did not exist as little as 15 years ago. Perhaps the recent, although not large, increase of women and persons of color in the superintendency has been the result of this literature and the need for qualified candidates. Fifth, research has pointed to the existence of feminine attributes (Brunner, 2000a, 2000b; Helgesen, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Sherman & Repa, 1994; Wesson & Grady, 1994, 1995), such as a predisposition toward collaborative work and a focus on instruction, at a time when men, by and large, in government continue to mandate collaborative decision-making. Sixth, women dominate educational administration programs currently, and persons of color, who were once denied an education, have unprecedented access.

As stated earlier, the feminization of teaching meant that the role was considered primarily women's work; it was a fairly low-status role, making it also open to persons of color in the South; and wages remained relatively low. Consider, then, that feminine attributes of leadership have become valuable, whether this means that the superintendency is women's work, that the status of the superintendency appears to be dropping, and that salaries for women (white and of color) superintendents are not much higher than salaries for women central office administrators (Brunner & Grogan, 2003), and whether this makes women and persons of color more attractive superintendency candidates.

These questions have yet to be answered. However, if the superintendency is becoming more feminized by virtue of the attributes that are necessary to perform the required work, then such jobs may become more broadly open to women and persons of color, just as teaching did.

Contemporary Issues

A host of political, economic, social, and professional issues are affecting school superintendents. Many are centered on long-standing concerns such as relationships with school board members and job security. The following topics are especially noteworthy with respect to contemporary problems:

- The effects of state deregulation and district decentralization on the superintendency
- Superintendent influence on school district performance
- Practice in districts experiencing high rates of leadership instability (e.g., large, urban districts)
- Best practices in school reform, visioning, and planning
- Building coalitions and partnerships for improving education

Studies in these and related areas would broaden the professional knowledge base and deepen perspectives about the contextual nature of contemporary practice.

NOTES

1. Hawaii has only one school system and the superintendent is appointed by the State Board of Education.

2. In some states, this position has a different title. The title "commissioner of education" is used in about one fourth of the states (e.g., Kentucky, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York); other states use titles such as *secretary of education* (Pennsylvania) and *director of education* (Iowa).

3. This power could be expressed through activities such as making employment decisions, awarding contracts, and doling out favors to segments of the community.

4. Several reasons for the decline of male teachers have been advanced by historians and others of the time: (a) low wages made the job unattractive to capable men, (b) the status of teaching was considered "belittling" to men because it was poor work (Bardeen, 1908; cited in Blount, 1998), (c) arguments that teaching was women's work made it less appealing, (d) men did not like working with women, and finally, (e) during the Civil War, thousands of men left teaching

to fight, and not many returned to the role after the war (Blount, 1998).

5. Portions of this section were taken from C. C. Brunner, 2000, "Unsettled Moments in Settled Discourse: Women Superintendents' Experiences of Inequality. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(1), 76-116.

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