Women Superintendents In Illinois: Gender Barriers and Challenges

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Women face unique challenges as superintendents. This study determined barriers women face as superintendents and elicited reasons why these women would consider leaving the superintendent's position. Thirty-nine PreK-12 women superintendents in Illinois participated in a web-based survey in January 2008. Survey items included information regarding characteristics, pathways to the superintendency, personal barriers, professional barriers, and factors that would cause women to consider leaving the superintendency. Respondents identified familial responsibilities, gender discrimination, employment opportunities, and self-confidence as major barriers. Factors that would cause women superintendents to leave their position included employment opportunities, familial responsibilities, and peer support. Six women were also personally interviewed to clarify survey responses and to gain greater insights regarding the barriers. The women indicated that they had experienced barriers related to gender discrimination and familial responsibilities. These barriers did not contribute to the superintendents leaving their current positions. Their reasons for seeking new positions would be to pursue opportunities that would enhance their professional experiences or improve their compensation.

Women who become superintendents overcome unique barriers in their ascent to the position. The United States Census Bureau asserts that the superintendency is "the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States" (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, p. 17, 2000). The American Association of School Administrators' (AASA) mid-decade study of the superintendency shows that 78.3% of the nation's superintendents are male (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Nevertheless, the number of women superintendents across the nation is increasing. A study by AASA in 2000 reported a gain in which the percentage of women superintendents rose to 14% in 2000 compared to 6.6% in 1992 (Witmer, 2006). The latest edition in 2007 reported 21.7% women superintendents (Glass & Franceschini). As the percentage of women superintendents continues to grow throughout the nation, so does the research concerning the challenges in their pathway to the superintendent position.

Professional challenges of women superintendents have been the subject of research in the last three decades, and while this research has been

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focused in specific states, Boudreau's 1994 study is one that focused on women superintendents in Illinois. In the state of Illinois, "14.4 percent of superintendents were women in 2000, compared with only 6.3 percent ten years prior" (Ringel, Gates, Chung, Brown, Ghosh-Dastidar, 2004, p. xiv). Since the number of women superintendents has doubled since Boudreau's work, a replication of the study was deemed appropriate.

Skrla's 1997 dissertation entitled *The Social Construction of Gender in the Superintendency* uncovered many reasons why successful women superintendents left the superintendency in Texas. Women superintendents who overcame barriers and coped with job stress considered leaving the superintendency because of "androcentric bias" (Skrla, p. 6). This study extended Boudreau's study by asking acting women superintendents about reasons for leaving the superintendency. Research in Illinois related to women superintendents' thoughts of retention in or flight from the superintendency led to new information.

The research questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of women superintendents in Illinois?
2. What are the career pathways of women superintendents in Illinois?
3. What are the personal barriers encountered by women superintendents in Illinois?
4. What are the professional barriers encountered by women superintendents in Illinois?
5. What factors cause women superintendents in Illinois to consider leaving the superintendency?

Literature Review

During the last thirty years, both professional and personal challenges for female superintendents have been the subject of much research. Estler (1975) developed three models that encompass the barriers women encounter in becoming school superintendents, and these are defined as the Woman's Place Model, the Discrimination Model, and the Meritocracy Model. The Woman's Place Model "describes a world in which there are men's jobs and women's jobs" (p. 368). Estler's Discrimination Model assumes "that institutional patterns are a result of the efforts of one group to

exclude participation of another" (p. 369). Her Meritocracy Model assumes "that men occupy the highest positions because men are the most qualified people in the pool of candidates for a given job" (p. 370). Estler's research found that women seeking the superintendency were more often challenged by the Woman's Place Model and the Discrimination Model than the Meritocracy Model.

Shakeshaft (1980) was among the first researchers to compile an exhaustive collection of research on women in educational administration. Her doctoral dissertation completed at Texas A&M University, analyzed all of the dissertation literature published from 1973 to 1978 on women in education. Her work provided a foundation for understanding the early body of research related to women and their roles in educational administration. Sex favoritism towards males, discrimination patterns, and women's occupational opportunities were some of the areas she identified as subjects for additional research (Shakeshaft). Shakeshaft's research continued past her dissertation culminating in the 1989 book entitled *Women in Educational Administration* documenting barriers for women in educational administration. The text specifically addressed those barriers associated with male dominance in the educational world, discussing both overt and covert gender discrimination. In addition, her research recommended that women adapt to changes that would demolish the barriers, such as changes in training programs, organizational context, and the structure of society.

Studies particular to Illinois are studies conducted by Hackett (1998), Boudreau (1994), and Dopp (1985). Boudreau's research was limited to nine female superintendents from the state. With regard to barriers, one of her findings reported that women superintendents "are not particularly challenged by the experience of discrimination or sexual harassment" (p. 128). Additional findings reported by Boudreau stated that women superintendents were challenged by

> . . . the existing perception of not having "all women" in leadership roles of a district which is in contrast to the acceptance of "all men" in leadership roles of a district[,] . . . not being as well represented as men by the gatekeeper/headhunter organizations . . . [,] . . . the aspect of gender entering into the evaluation of their performance[,] . . . the stereotypic view of women being "big spenders" in the area of finance[,] . . . women school board members . . . [,] . . . reside[ing] within their own school district[,]

> . . . subordinate relationships particularly by male staff[,] . . . when to choose to pursue an advanced degree[, and] . . . home caretaking responsibilities . . . (pp. 128–130)

Hackett's (1998) research was limited to six exemplary women superintendents and included investigating their "perspectives regarding perceived barriers" (p. 24). A summary of the major findings included

1. The majority of women superintendents experienced numerous barriers in their climb to the top position.

2. Even those superintendents who experienced few barriers acknowledge that other women encountered barriers.
3. Many barriers are found in to [sic] the search or hiring process.
4. Sexual stereotyping is still prevalent, both in society and in the work force.
5. Women as well as men may be guilty of sex bias.
6. Women may be jealous of other women.
7. Men may be threatened by competence.
8. Barriers can be insidious as well as overt. (p. 192)

In 1984 there were only 21 women superintendents in Illinois. Dopp's (1985) study provided the first and only profile of women superintendents in the state. She wrote that her study's purpose "was to provide insight into . . . career paths and patterns of personal and professional development . . ." (pp. 2–3). Although the study did not specifically deal with barriers faced by women superintendents, the findings did mention hindrances to their careers. In the summary she stated,

> Fifty percent of the superintendents felt that being female was not a hindrance in the accomplishment of their career goals. These persons believed that once they had been chosen for an administrative position, gender no longer entered into their career paths. The superintendents who felt that being a female was a hindrance in accomplishing career goals believed that factor was only evident in accessing the first administrative position. (p. 176)

Not since 1985 has there been a profile of Illinois women superintendents. Hackett's (1998) study identified perceived barriers, but was limited to six exemplary Illinois women superintendents, a finite sample. Boudreau's research in 1994, surveyed a sample of nine Illinois women superintendents with the purpose of identifying the barriers they faced.

Methods

Sample

A mixed method research design, including quantitative and qualitative methods was the basis for the study. The population for the study included 81 Illinois women superintendents in PreK–12 districts in January 2008. Thirty-nine (48.1%) participated in the web-based survey. Six women superintendents who completed the survey were selected for interviews.

Data Collection

Stouder's (1998) Participant Questionnaire for her dissertation, entitled "A Profile of Female Indiana School Superintendents" was modified to fit the needs of the study and then utilized. Data resulting from responses to the 2008 questionnaire described the respondent sample numerically, including statistics concerning age, ethnicity, marital status, highest degree held, number of years of teaching experience prior to entering an administrative

position, number of administrative positions experienced prior to entering a superintendent position, age at the time of first superintendency, number of years in present position, number of superintendent positions for which respondent applied before first acquisition, whether the respondent had spent her entire educational career in one school district, school district enrollment, and the makeup of current district administration. Typical career paths were described by selecting from these job titles: elementary teacher, secondary teacher, counselor, elementary principal, secondary principal, director, assistant secondary principal, assistant superintendent, school business official. Participants were asked to select a response from a five-item descriptive scale to identify the degree to which they experienced barriers and the degree of difficulty they had in overcoming each barrier. Participants were asked to consider if they decided to leave the position of superintendent at the end of this school year, which factors would they regard as having contributed to this event. Factors were ordered from most strongly considered to least. Disaggregation of the responses provided a statistical analysis of the population and its subgroups.

Qualitative research extended the statistical results. In-depth interviews sought to define and clarify the trend data concerning barriers identified in the survey results. A purposive sample of six women superintendents made up the interview sample. One subgroup of three female superintendents was made up of women who were the chief administrators, with only building principals as additional administrators in their districts. A superintendent in this subgroup was the chief administrator who assumed responsibility for personnel, fiscal, and curricular duties in the district. The other subgroup of three women superintendents consisted of those who were the chief administrators with assistant superintendents or with school business officials in their districts. Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed for salience, using Alexander's (1990) nine identifiers of saliency. Statements expressed in the interviews validated the identification of personal and professional barriers in the survey. Results of the interviews were reported parenthetically.

Findings

Characteristics of Illinois Women Superintendents
A majority of women superintendents of PreK–12 districts in Illinois who participated in the study were between the ages of 51 and 55. They were white, married, with educational specialist degrees. They had taught an average of 12.54 years, had held three administrative positions before becoming a superintendent at an average age of 47.31, and had served an average of 3.49 years in their current positions, managing districts with enrollments less than 1,499 students and with administrative teams of building principals. When comparing this study's results with those of Shakeshaft's (1980) synthesis of information from 1973 to 1978 on women in educational administration, there was little difference. Shakeshaft reported that

the mean age of women superintendents was 54.75 with a range of means between 44-60. Boudreau's (1994) study reported similar statistics about women superintendents in Illinois, with a majority of study participants who were white, between the ages of 40 to 49, and married. Boudreau's study differed concerning the highest degree held by women superintendents. A majority of Boudreau's participants held doctorate degrees, while the 2008 study had a majority of women superintendents with educational specialist degrees.

Career Paths of Illinois Women Superintendents

Of the 39 respondents, there were 24 different career paths. Only one went from a teaching position to the superintendency in one step. Ten moved through two positions before becoming a superintendent. Eleven respondents held three positions before the superintendency. Fourteen attained the superintendency after four positions, and three moved through five positions before becoming a superintendent. Twelve superintendents had experience as both an elementary and secondary teacher. Fourteen superintendents began their careers as elementary teachers; thirteen superintendents began their careers as secondary teachers.

Two positions, secondary principal and assistant superintendent, preceded a superintendent position for a number of survey respondents. Thirteen (33.3%) respondents moved from a secondary principalship to the superintendency, and another thirteen (33.3%) respondents moved from an assistant superintendent position to the position of superintendent.

Personal Barriers Encountered by Illinois Women Superintendents

Women superintendents of PreK–12 districts in Illinois cited familial responsibilities as a barrier. Respondents indicated a perception that the traditional role in society was for the male spouse's occupation to determine the family's residence. Residency was an issue when the female spouse wanted her husband to move. Moving children was another issue related to family responsibilities. Having grown children eased the burden of family responsibilities for women superintendents. Family responsibilities related to housework, preparing meals, and child-care arrangements were often viewed as female spouse responsibilities that were in addition to female spouse professional responsibilities.

Family responsibilities as a barrier to the superintendency and in the superintendency were identified throughout the literature and supported this finding (Johnson, 2006; Miller, 2006; Montz, 2004; Wickham, 2007). Family responsibilities were expressed in a variety of ways, as personal anxiety about the effect of career on family, as conflicting demands of career and family, and as time and attention diverted from families to accomplish work-related responsibilities.

Another personal barrier identified was self-confidence. Female superintendents indicated that their confidence was challenged by an established closely knit group of male superintendents that provided limited opportu-

nities for female networking and mentoring. Athletic coaching and playing golf were examples of networking opportunities that were typically represented by more males than women. While the nature of being a superintendent was grounded in professional experiences, an entry to the social side of this professional world appeared to be tied frequently to male athletic interests. Review of the literature supported this finding (Adkison, 1981; Galloway, 2006; Olsen, 2005; Sanders, 2007).

Professional Barriers Encountered by Illinois Women Superintendents

Women superintendents of PreK–12 districts in Illinois cited issues of gender discrimination and employment opportunities as barriers difficult to overcome. Comments from respondents indicated that employment opportunities and gender discrimination were sometimes not separate. Search firms predominantly staffed by retired male superintendents were viewed as limiting the opportunity for employment. When the recruiting group was governed and staffed exclusively by men, the perception was that there was discrimination against women candidates. Male imagery in the superintendent role was viewed as difficult to overcome. Research supported that women continued to be viewed as less capable and less effective than males resulting in relegation to less superior roles (Bañuelos, 2008; Sanders, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Gender discrimination as a barrier had been cited in the literature. Gender discrimination was identified in Shakeshaft's (1980) dissertation. Gender discrimination in accessing the first administrative position was indicated in Dopp's (1985) study of women superintendents in Illinois. Roger's (2005) dissertation reported women's perception of gender discrimination. Bañuelos' (2008) research found gender bias as a factor in performance evaluation among women superintendents in California, and Sanders' (2007) research found gender bias as a factor in being selected as a superintendent among women superintendents in Kentucky. Violette's (2007) study of female superintendents from Tennessee identified gender bias among board members evidenced by their perception that women were poor money managers. Miller (2006) in Missouri and Wickham (2007) in California identified gender bias among women superintendents related to the "good old boy" network that promoted men to become superintendents over women. Montz (2004) found similar results among women superintendents in an unidentified midwestern state.

Employment opportunity as a barrier was closely aligned to the barrier of familial responsibilities. A recent report by Grogan and Brunner (2005) stated that employment opportunities were limited by an inability or unwillingness to relocate. Miller's (2006) research of women superintendents in Missouri and Loesch's (2006) research of women superintendents in Texas also cited relocation as a barrier to employment opportunities. Relocation posed a barrier to women seeking superintendencies. Moving a spouse and family or living apart from

spouse and family created hardship and disruption for both the superintendent and the family unit as a whole.

Women superintendents of PreK–12 districts in Illinois indicated that employment opportunities, familial responsibilities, and peer/collegial support would be factors causing them to consider leaving the superintendency. Women superintendents revealed that they would seek new positions when their employment opportunities could be improved by the challenge of a larger or more diverse district and/or by more desirable contract stipulations.

While the question of factors leading to leaving the superintendency had not been addressed in recent studies, there were studies that reported women superintendents were satisfied in their jobs and were committed to addressing the challenges they faced in public education (Galloway, 2006; Lopez, 2008; Rogers, 2005). The 2008 Illinois Women Superintendent Survey reflected the same satisfaction and commitment in their current positions.

Comparison to Recent National and State Studies of Superintendents

Glass and Franceschini's (2007) mid-decade study of the superintendency for the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) had results worthy of comparing to this study. Glass and Franceschini's national study had a return rate of 1,338 responses from a working population of

TABLE 1

Extent to Which Barriers Exist Identified by Women Superintendents in PreK–12, Districts in Illinois ($N = 39$).

Frame	Significant Barrier		A Barrier		Unsure		Somewhat a Barrier		Not a Barrier	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Family support	0	0.0	3	7.7	0	0.0	5	12.8	31	79.5
Employment opportunity	1	2.6	3	7.7	1	2.6	16	41.0	18	46.2
Gender discrimination	3	7.7	7	17.9	4	10.3	14	35.9	11	28.2
Peer/collegial support	0	0.0	3	7.7	2	5.1	14	35.9	20	51.3
Familial responsibilities	2	5.1	6	15.4	1	2.6	19	48.7	11	28.2
Self-confidence	0	0.0	5	12.8	2	5.1	16	41.0	16	41.0
Racial/Ethnic discrimination	1	2.6	2	5.1	2	5.1	1	2.6	33	84.6
Personal tenacity	0	0.0	1	2.6	6	15.4	4	10.3	28	71.8

7,958 superintendents, resulting in 23.4% return rate compared to this study's 48.1% return rate.

Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported

> In the past 50 years modest demographic changes have occurred in the public school superintendency. A notable exception has been the increasing numbers of women entering the profession. In 1950, there were but 6.7% of women serving in city school districts (AASA, 1952). The number nationwide has increased to 21.7% in the 2006 study. Increases in this percentage promise to continue as more former elementary teachers become principals and assistant superintendents (p. 15).

AASA's study by Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported an estimated mean age of superintendents as 54.6 years. Estimated median age was 55 years. Similar estimated median and mean results occurred in this study. Of the responding Illinois women superintendents in 2008, the greatest percentage, 35.7%, was between 55 and 59 years of age. Median superintendent age in the 2008 Illinois women's study was between 51 and 55 years of age.

Glass and Franceschini's (2007) study used the following racial/ethnic identifications, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, White (not Hispanic or Latino), and Other. The findings were aggregated as White, resulting in 93.8%, and as other ethnicity, resulting in 6.2%. In the Illinois women's study in 2008, respondents were 100% white.

Marital status of Glass and Franceschini's (2007) respondents show some similarity to this study. Glass and Franceschini reported 89.4% Married, 2.1% Single (never married), 6.7% Divorced/Separated, 1.2% Widowed, and 0.5% Other. This study reported 87.7% married, 5.1% single, and 7.7% divorced. Glass and Franceschini broke down the marital status of superintendents by gender. They reported that 93.87% of male superintendents were married compared to 75.45% of female superintendents. Women superintendents, on the average, have a lower percentage of married persons among them than do male superintendents.

AASA's study by Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported that "almost 51% of responding superintendents [male and female] indicated they possessed an earned doctoral degree. This percentage is five points higher than in 2000" (p. 41). They reported little change in the statistic when the results concern women superintendents and doctoral degrees. Women superintendents held doctoral degrees in these percentages in these years, 58% in 1992, 56% in 2000, and 58% in 2006. Glass and Franceschini reported these conclusions.

> In the past three AASA studies, higher percentages of women superintendents held a doctoral degree than their male counterparts. Some anecdotal-based studies claim that relatively few women doctoral students in educational administration programs are opting to apply for the superintendent's credential. This may indicate a desire on their part to remain in the principalship or a central office position (p. 41).

While Glass and Franceschini's (2007) study did not specifically address the number of years of experience prior to becoming a superintendent, nor the number of administrative positions held before becoming a superintendent, their study did determine the position held just before becoming a superintendent. Their survey results indicated that the greatest percentage of superintendents, 46.7, moved from principal to superintendent, followed by 29% that moved from assistant superintendent to superintendent. Glass and Franceschini noted that "women superintendents were much more likely to have entered the superintendency from an assistant superintendent position" (p. 35). This study had a different conclusion. The greatest percentage of the responding women superintendents, 43.5%, moved from principalship to the superintendency, specifically 33.3% from secondary principalship and 10.2% from elementary principship. Thirty-three percent of the women respondents were assistant superintendents before becoming superintendents.

Glass and Franceschini's (2007) study did not address the age at which respondents became superintendents. Their survey did determine the number of years superintendents had served in current positions. Their results reported an estimated mean of 5.5 years and an estimated median of 5.7 years in current superintendency. This study reported women superintendents in Illinois having a mean of 3.49 years and a median of 3 years in their present positions.

Glass and Franceschini (2007) reported a greater percentage of superintendents with lengthy tenures in their positions. Glass and Franceschini's survey reported 15% of their respondents with 10 or more years in their current position, while this survey reported 2.6% of the women respondents in a current position for more than 10 years, in this case 14 years.

AASA's study by Glass and Franceschini (2007) did not report the number of applications made before attaining the superintendency. Their study did address the number of districts served. Their study reported "over half (52%) of the responding superintendents indicated serving in only one district. Just under a quarter (24.7%) said they had served in two districts, and 23.3% indicated service in three or more districts" (p. 30). This survey had different results. Of this survey's respondents, the vast majority (94.7%) had served in more than one district during their careers.

Glass and Franceschini's (2007) study surveyed national school district superintendents offering eight district size categories ranging from 1 to 999 to 100,000 or more. Their study reported 64.3% of the respondents were in districts with enrollments from 1 to 2,999 and 31.45% of the respondents were in districts with enrollments from 3,000 to 9,999. While different enrollment ranges were used in this study and are not consistent with Glass and Franceschini's, they are proximate. This survey showed that 84.6% of the respondents were superintendents in districts with enrollments from 1 to 2,499 and 15.4% were superintendents in districts with enrollments from 2,500 to 9,999.

The study by Glass and Franceschini (2007) did not address the makeup

of districts' administrative teams as did this survey, nor did they address barriers to the superintendency. They did elaborate on working conditions of the superintendency. Concerning stress in the superintendency, they said, "Levels of *very great stress* are highest in smaller districts. This could be due to superintendents initially learning their way in the profession with little help from central office administrative staff" (p. 47).

This conclusion can align with this study's data indicating that 79.5% of the respondents served in districts without central office administrative staff.

An important question asked of superintendents in the Glass and Franceschini (2007) study was "the reasons why they thought there were comparatively few females in the superintendency." (p. 63). They further explained that "this question was posed because a substantial amount of literature discusses possible reasons why female superintendents are underrepresented in the educational profession" (p. 63).

Glass and Fransceschini (2007) asked respondents to select from these factors to answer the question, "absence of mentors at district level, absence of mentors in higher education programs, family concerns, gender discrimination by boards, presence of a glass ceiling, working conditions of the superintendency not appealing to women, and other" (p. 64). The authors of the study noted that the findings vary when the responses of female superintendents are disaggregated. Women cited gender discrimination by boards as the greatest factor at 28.8%, while men cited working conditions of the superintendent not appealing to women as the greatest factor at 28.3%. Women cited working conditions of the superintendent not appealing to women at 24.2%, while men cited family concerns at 22.3%. Women cited the presence of a glass ceiling at 16.5%, while men cited "other" as 14.6% and gender discrimination by boards at 14.4%.

The authors noted that "while the differences between male and female superintendents are not large, they do merit attention, since male superintendents who selected these issues are making a statement about a gender other than their own" (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 64). They concluded that "female superintendents definitely perceive that more 'roadblocks' exist for females in the profession than do their male counterparts" (p. 64).

Survey results from "A Summary Report of the 2008 (2007–2008 School Year) Survey of Illinois Superintendents" are noteworthy for comparison with this study's results. The aforementioned Summary Report was a study conducted by Berg (2008) of the Department of Educational Administration of Eastern Illinois University for the Illinois Association of School Administrators. This survey found that, "the 'typical' superintendent in the State of Illinois is a 51 year old white (95.3 percent), married male with a specialist degree (55.6 percent) who has been in education for 24 years and has served in their [sic] current position for 4 years" (p. 4). The Berg survey was sent to 869 superintendents and had a response of 402 resulting in a response rate of 46%. Twenty-three percent of the responses were from female superintendents and 76.4% of the responses were from male

superintendents. In addition, 45.4% of the Berg survey respondents were superintendents in unit districts. The Berg survey reported that 95.3% of its respondents were white, 91% were married, and 9% were single. Concerning degrees, the Berg reported 4.2% of the responding superintendents had master's degrees, 55.6% had specialist or equivalent degrees, and 40.2% had doctorates.

Berg (2008) asked, "What was your age at the beginning of your first year as a superintendent?" The mean age was 43.9, the minimum age 28, and the maximum age 58 of 400 respondents. When the data from this survey was compared to the Berg survey, the findings showed that women are on the average, older than men when they attain the superintendency, 47, years old compared to 43.9 years old for males.

Berg (2008) found that the mean number of years that a current superin tendent had served in his/her current position was 4.4 years. Comparing the data from this study to Berg's data, the women have served, on average, fewer years in their current positions than the men, 3.49 years compared to 4.4 years.

Although a direct comparison cannot be made between the PreK–12 women superintendent enrollment statistics and those of the Berg survey because of differing survey questions, some statistics can be associated. The Berg (2008) survey asked the length of time taken to obtain a first superintendency once certified and actively seeking such a position. In the Berg survey, 61.8% of the respondents indicated less than one year and 15.5% indicated one year. The findings from this survey indicated that women, on the average, seek the superintendency for longer periods of time or with more applications than the superintendents who responded in the Berg study.

The Berg (2008) survey reported that only 4.3% of the respondents had spent their entire educational career in one school district. When respondents in the Berg survey were asked if they had been appointed to his/her first superintendency from inside the same district, 41.4% had been appointed from within.

A direct comparison cannot be made between the PreK–12 Illinois women superintendent enrollment statistics and those of the Berg (2008) survey because of different group sizes, but some statistics can be associated. The Berg survey reported 51% of the responding superintendents were in districts with less than 999 students compared to this study's 66.7% in districts with less than 1,499 students. The Berg survey reported 35.5% are in districts with 1,000 to 2,999 student enrollment compared to this survey's 17.9% in districts with 1,500 to 2,499 students.

Again, a direct comparison cannot be made between the PreK–12 women superintendent survey and the Berg (2008) survey because of differing questions concerning leaving a current superintendency, there are noteworthy results to report. The Berg survey asked "the main reason you left your last superintendency" (p. 12) and reported these conclusions.

One superintendent reported leaving their [sic] previous position because of the termination of their [sic] contract. However, 23 percent of the respondents left their previous position due to conflicts with board members or due to a board of education election and changed politics. On a positive note, 34.8 percent of the respondents reported they left their previous position for a larger district superintendency (p. 12).

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

Women entering the field of educational administration need to be informed regarding the conclusions from the 2008 study of women superintendents in Illinois. These conclusions would be useful in preparing and planning for their future in educational administration and in developing systems of support and networks for professional and personal growth. The Illinois research validated current findings from other states on the role of women superintendents which must be embedded into educational administration courses. Perceptions of gender differences in areas such as leadership, organization, style, and communications must be studied. As study specific to gender issues increases, awareness of and mitigation of gender differences should follow. School board associations should find the study's results useful in cultivating an understanding of gender differences in educational administration, in developing gender equity in performance evaluations for superintendents, and in establishing the need for delivery of diversity training for board members. The purpose should be to transform the role of women as educational leaders, as being as capable as males in this role. Administrative search firms and board of education organizations that provide superintendent searches must include women in their search teams to advocate for women's representation among candidates.

Diminishing androcentric bias is a necessary objective in eliminating barriers to the superintendency for women. The barrier is the male-constructed expectation. Women are urged to employ tactics like, "being assertive without being pushy—being friendly without being flirty" (Skrla, 1997, p. 14) to diminish the affronts they experience related to androcentric bias. Very little has been developed to diminish men's nonverbal and verbal androcentric affronts. Women perceive bias; some men do not. Organizations must assume the responsibility for empowering their membership to develop a better understanding of the diversity and the subtleties of gender discrimination. Educational administration as a profession must evolve into a new social reality based on tolerance of gender differences and on personal ethics of equality.

If gender bias is observable in districts and at some or all levels of administration, the question of gender discrimination will be raised for all parents as they consider choices about school districts their children attend. Olsen (2005) asks this question perceptively.

The question that necessarily follows is, if administrators demonstrate sexist attitudes or discriminate in other ways against females, or for that matter, one another, then how does that attitude transfer to the treatment of students and climate of the schools they administer? (p. 248)

Implications

Superintendent search firms need greater representation of women among their consultants. Women must secure places among these organizations to ensure equity in representation. Search firms should select their team members to represent a variety of experiences, a broad geographic area, and diversified demographics. If search teams are to present the candidates best suited to serve a district, then female representatives on a search team can share with board members the leadership qualities and qualifications that women candidates bring to the superintendency which board members may overlook. When women are represented in search firms, opportunities for networks of women executives can be established that can match the networks of relationships that exist among male superintendents.

Educational leadership graduate programs need to inform women aspiring to the superintendency of the research on the barriers and challenges related to gender discrimination and employment opportunities. Women aspiring to the superintendency should be informed of the most successful pathways to the superintendency. Secondary principalships and established networks are vehicles that advance women to the superintendency. Research has revealed different expectations of male and female superintendents. For instance, assertive women are perceived as being aggressive while aggressive males are perceived as being assertive. Shakeshaft's (1989) research noted that "assertiveness is a skill that women, by and large, have not been socialized to call their own" (p. 114). Graduate programs should also inform women that there will be different perceptions and expectations of women in the superintendent's role. This will be evidenced in working with boards of education, employees, and the public. How women achieve accountability and respect among these groups may be different than for men. Shakeshaft's 1989 book, *Women in Educational Administration,* includes a table that reports the difference in the words and phrases found in evaluations for women and for men. Among the phrases used in evaluations of men are "Dynamic," "Forceful," "Assertive," and "Aggressive," while the phrases "Receptive," "Bright," "Valuable asset," and "Personable" are used in evaluations of women (p. 107). Developing an understanding of these differences can certainly help women in seeking and remaining in the superintendency. As Skrla (1997), points out, the job is only half-done if developing an understanding of the differences is not assimilated by the board members and others with whom women superintendents must work. Women aspiring to the superintendency need to know these issues.

Women superintendents should increase their memberships in organizations specific to women in educational leadership. Active membership in

these organizations is critical to having their voices heard. Women must certainly network with men and develop networks of support among other women. Through achieving numbers of representatives and collective understandings of their roles, women will effect changes in accessing the superintendency and in how they evolve as educational leaders in their states and country.

Conclusion

As the number of women superintendents in Illinois increases, the women superintendents of Illinois continue to identify barriers in their ascent to the position. Gender discrimination, familial responsibilities, employment opportunities, and self-confidence emerged as the most prominent barriers. These barriers were the same barriers women superintendents have identified during the last thirty years. Female superintendents identified gender bias in employment opportunities as an issue in three significant areas, the first of which was accessing a superintendent position. They also believed it to be an issue as far as being viewed as equally capable to male counterparts. The third facet where women noticed gender bias was with acceptance into established pathways and networks that led them to assume a superintendent position. Women identified barriers related to familial responsibilities: family concerns raised in moving school-age children to a new community to assume a superintendent position, responsibilities assumed by the female spouse related to housework, meal preparation, and child-care. Self-confidence, challenged by a lack of female mentoring and significantly male-dominated administrative social networks, also prevent women from obtaining the superintendent position. As graduate educational leadership programs, administrative search firms, superintendent organizations, and board member associations recognize that research continues to identify barriers, they must take deliberate steps to mitigate these barriers so that equity and equality in the position can be realized.

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