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Race, Gender, and School Leadership in a State with Shifting Student Demographics

Liz Hollingworth and David Dude

This is an analysis of equity in Iowa educational leadership from the 1978–1979 school year through 2007–2008, and the extent to which rapidly changing student racial demographics are reflected in the schools. We found that male principals continue to outnumber women 6:1 in rural districts, but in urban schools the rate is closer to 1:1. Female superintendents are now paid statistically the same as men, but women in every other educational position make on average less money than men. The data also reveal that the race of Iowa educators has not shifted to reflect the increasingly racially diverse student body.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2004 71% of American teachers were women (U.S. Census, 2004), but a 2006 study by the American Association of School Administrators found that only 21.7% of school districts were led by women (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While this figure is an increase from 1950, when the percentage was 6.7%, the gender norms for the top leadership positions in public schools have been slow to change. As other researchers interested in the study of the superintendency have noted, the teaching profession in the U.S. is and has historically been dominated by women, yet administration positions are held mostly by men (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2002; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Curry, 2000; Donald, 1999; Garn & Brown, 2008; N. Mertz & S. McNeely, 1994; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Rusch, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1987; Tallerico, 2000; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993). This phenomenon can be partially explained by cultural norms and discourses that reinforce the notion, or myth, that men are naturally more inclined to hold high-powered positions of leadership (Björk, 2000), and by researchers who have found that the language of recruitment normalizes the American school superintendency as a leadership job destined for men (Newton, 2006).

This is a study of the demographic trends in school administration over the past 30 years in a Midwestern state. We explore the ways the state itself is shifting away from a mostly White population, and the rates at which both women and non-White educators have progressed through the leadership pipeline since 1978. We situate this work in the context of feminist scholars who have called for an examination of trends in the superinten-

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gency in race and gender because this is “the administrative position that has been slowest to integrate women and people of color” (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). To this end, we designed this quantitative study to explore whether the national movement toward more women in school administration since the passage of Title IX in 1972 (Mertz, 2006) is reflected in the Iowa data, and if the increase in non-White K–12 student populations is reflected in the race of Iowa educators.

This article begins with a broader exploration of equity and leadership issues in Iowa with an overview of the state context and then reviews the theories relevant to the understanding of the barriers that prevent many women and educators of color to rise to leadership positions in American schools. Publicly available quantitative data are then used to explore the following three research questions: What have been the trends from 1978–1979 through 2007–2008 in women in school administrative positions in Iowa? Are the changing racial demographics reflected in the school administration pipeline? Are there differences in compensation by gender and/or race?

State Context

Iowa and Mississippi are the only two states that have never elected a woman governor, senator, or Congressional representative. Among the possible explanations given by the Associated Press for this unusual bias is Iowa's “predominantly senior population and their deeply held views on the role of women as well as the tendency for urban areas to elect more women than rural states. Iowa ranks fourth in the nation in the percentage of its population 65 and older and is heavily rural”(The Associated Press,

TABLE 1
Race of K–12 Superintendents, Teachers, New-Hire Teachers, and Students in Iowa.

School Year	Superintendents		Teachers		New-Hire Teachers		Students	
	White	Non-White	White	Non-White	White	Non-White	White	Non-White
1996–1997	98.9% (364)	1.1% (4)	98.5% (37974)	1.5% (590)	96.9% (2560)	3.1% (81)	92.2% (461783)	7.8% (38999)
1997–1998	98.9% (358)	1.1% (4)	98.4% (38274)	1.6% (614)	97.6% (3758)	2.4% (94)	91.8% (457910)	8.2% (40990)
1998–1999	98.9% (355)	1.1% (4)	98.3% (38484)	1.7% (658)	96.9% (3677)	3.1% (116)	93.2% (462283)	6.8% (33931)
1999–2000	99.1% (347)	0.9% (3)	98.3% (37479)	1.7% (638)	98.0% (4255)	2.0% (86)	90.8% (449315)	9.2% (45647)
2000–2001	99.1% (344)	0.9% (3)	98.3% (37970)	1.7% (654)	97.6% (4105)	2.4% (103)	89.6% (440956)	10.4% (51066)
2001–2002	98.6% (344)	1.4% (5)	98.4% (38264)	1.6% (639)	98.2% (6396)	1.8% (67)	89.6% (435472)	10.4% (50460)
2002–2003	98.6% (358)	1.4% (5)	98.3% (37894)	1.7% (664)	97.5% (2783)	2.5% (70)	89.0% (429024)	11.0% (53186)
2003–2004	98.3% (347)	1.7% (6)	98.3% (38056)	1.7% (662)	97.8% (3178)	2.2% (73)	88.2% (424341)	11.8% (56885)
2004–2005	98.6% (347)	1.4% (5)	98.3% (37879)	1.7% (654)	97.9% (3141)	2.1% (68)	87.4% (417822)	12.6% (60497)
2005–2006	98.9% (349)	1.1% (4)	98.3% (38250)	1.7% (661)	98.0% (3417)	2.0% (70)	86.6% (418454)	13.4% (65028)
2006–2007	99.1% (348)	0.9% (3)	98.2% (38393)	1.8% (693)	97.8% (3691)	2.2% (84)	85.9% (415001)	14.1% (68121)

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate N-count of corresponding sub-group.

2005). This cultural reality about patriarchal gender roles and leadership expectations in Iowa may likely explain the trends in gender and school administration we found in our data.

Despite its reputation as a mostly rural, White Midwestern state, Iowa has in fact experienced a dramatic shift in its racial composition in the past 10 years, particularly in the student population (see Table 1). In the 1996–1997 school year, the first year these kinds of data were collected by the Iowa Department of Education, only 7.79% of the K–12 students were non-White. By 2007–2008, that number had doubled to 14.93%, which is particularly interesting given that the overall student population K–12 is dropping. The last decade has seen a loss of about 40,000 White students and a gain of approximately 25,000 non-White students. This can be partially explained by the expansion of the job market for immigrant families in Iowa. The slaughterhouses and meat packing plants across the state have hired new populations of non-White, immigrant workers with children who are English Language Learners, causing the districts in these neighborhoods to have to change the way they teach and to hire teachers with expertise in teaching English as a Second Language. We wondered if this shift in the demographics of the student body is also reflected in the race/ethnicity of Iowa educators.

Iowa has historically had a mostly rural population. In recent years, however, the larger cities have started to experience issues of student achievement, race, and poverty, which can be found in urban areas nationwide, including racial tensions (Urban Education Network of Iowa, 2006). In this study, we used a district's membership in the Urban Education Network (UEN) as a proxy for urbanicity, and that distinction allowed us to better investigate what types of schools are hiring non-White and female school administrators. The UEN is a formal coalition of the eight largest school districts in the state. Combined, these eight districts enroll nearly twenty-five percent of the state's total public school enrollment, according to the group's website (2006). The UEN offers support for the member schools in the form of leadership academies to address the unique challenges administrators and teachers in urban schools face.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical lens for this work on race and school leadership is outlined by researchers like Karpinski (2006), who posits that racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators are critical to successful schools, and Delpit (1995), who argues that “we should strive to make our teaching force diverse, for teachers who share the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of our increasingly diverse student bodies may serve . . . to provide insights that might otherwise be hidden” (p.167). In this philosophical paradigm, it is imperative that school districts actively recruit teachers and administrators who reflect the diverse backgrounds of the student populations in an effort to mediate cultural conflict in the classroom.

In addition, the research on gender in school administration informs our understanding of the social and cultural explanations for why more women have moved into the principalship in schools in the past decade, but not the superintendency (Mertz, 2006; N. T. Mertz & S. R. McNeely, 1994; Wesson & Grady, 1994). Issues of power and gender have been analyzed in the literature, mainly the masculinization of the superintendency by the school boards and community members in a position to hire, evaluate, and fire the superintendent (Brunner, 1999) and the ideas of career advancement and competition are normalized as male (Worrall, 1995). Without question, the state context supports the construct of top leadership as male. The research in the area of equity, social justice, and school leadership frames our stance on the roles gender and race play in administrator efficacy (Brown, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Rusch, 2004), in particular our understanding that effective school leadership requires academic, social, and cultural competencies, and that the race, gender, and ethnicity of educators has an effect on minority student achievement (Dee, 2004, 2005; Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer, 1995).

So, we ground our work in the theoretical stance that schools with diverse student populations should be actively recruiting and hiring educators who reflect the growing ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity of the community. Our expectation in a state with changing student demographics based on the literature is that the schools would begin to identify talented minority teachers for future leadership positions. In addition, the research tells us that there is a national trend toward hiring more women in school leadership positions (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007), but a community's cultural barriers and patriarchal power structures have historically interfered with the rise of women to the superintendency (Blount, 1998). Given this framework, we explored the trends in race, gender, and school leadership in Iowa to examine the ways Iowa public schools are meeting the new challenges of equity, social justice and diversity in its hiring trends and salaries.

Method

Data Sources

To answer our research questions about the characteristics of school administrators in Iowa, we conducted a study using existing data on educational administrator licensure from the state Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE), which licenses and certifies individuals to serve as administrators in the state. We also used data from the Basic Educational Data Survey (BEDS), which collects staffing, student and policy data from all K–12 public schools in Iowa, plus accredited nonpublic K–12 schools. The Director of the State Department of Education (DE) serves as the Chair of the BOEE, so many of the staff members who manage the database work with both the DE and the BOEE. This affects not only the kinds of data that

are collected, but also the attention to how accurate certain portions of the database need to be. Data from the BEDS are used to meet state and federal reporting requirements for NCLB, to respond to legislative requests for information, and to support education research.

Data Preparation

The Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) provided us with a database that contained records pertaining to people holding administrator-type licenses from 1978–2008. We then removed anyone with the building designation of 0000. Sometimes, this designation was for central office administrators (e.g., superintendents) and sometimes it was used as a default because no school code was provided by the school district when the data were entered.

One of the problems we faced was the inconsistent position codes used in the database for school administrators. First, we removed all building level assignments that were not coded “Principal- 513” or “Administrator-550.” Unfortunately, we found that sometimes more than one principal (an administrator with the 513 designation) was assigned to a building. Since there was no way for us to know who the primary administrator was in those cases, we selected the administrator with the higher salary. Then we examined the administrators coded 550 and used the same process to assign principals to buildings. All other records were thrown out. Between the 1996–97 and 2006–07 school years, we found an average of 1099 principals coded 513 and 73 coded 550. According to the State Department of Education, there are 1497 school buildings in the state. After cleaning the data, we had matched an average of 96% of the buildings to a principal for each school year.

Not surprisingly, holes were discovered in the dataset in the earlier years (1978–1980) because those data were collected on paper and were unedited. Our contact at the DE explained that since 1980 the electronic databases and the ability to edit the data have made them more accurate. These gaps limited the utility of some of the older data, particularly with respect to changes in salaries over time.

Findings

Race

Given the anecdotal evidence from around the state, we were not surprised to see that the race of Iowa superintendents is predominantly White, and there has not been a change in the race of school superintendents since 1996, when these kinds of data were first collected (see Table 1). The top leadership position in school districts across Iowa continues to be held almost exclusively by White males (Figure 1), with only three out of the 351 possible positions in the 2006–07 school year being held by two American Indians and one Hispanic superintendent. The numbers are more dramatic

Figure 1
Number of superintendents who are White and non-White from 1978–2008.

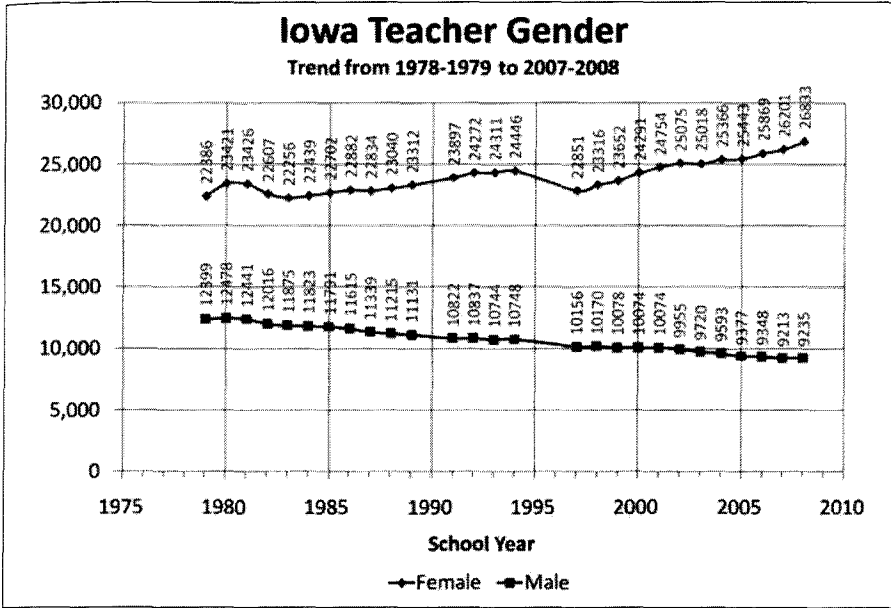
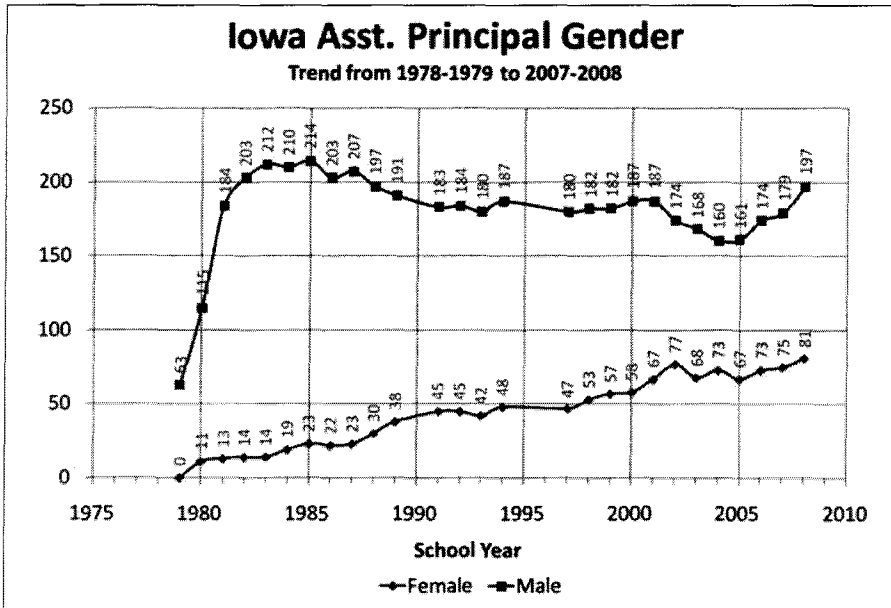


Figure 2
Number of associate superintendents who are White and non-White from 1978–2008.



in the Associate Superintendent category, with only one non-White candidate in the 2006–2007 school year (Figure 2).

The state personnel database breaks down the school principals by race. Figure 3 shows the trends for hiring principals by race in Iowa. These numbers also are unchanging over time when the state is examined as a whole, but we hypothesized that schools in urban areas, which serve a greater number of minority families, might have greater diversity among its educators. To approach this question, we turned to the database kept by the Urban Education Network (UEN). Race and poverty are trends that the UEN tracks in order to keep pace with the demographic shifts in the metro areas of the state. According to the UEN, the metro minority population grew by 65,000 from 1990–2000 (2006). Because race is so prevalent in the discourse of the UEN, we wondered if UEN schools were more likely to hire non-White principals in order to reflect the demographics of the families in the urban schools. We found that the UEN schools had only two Black principals; the rest were White (White = 93.33%; Black = 6.67%). As a comparison group, we also checked the race of principals in schools that were not part of the UEN and found that they too had very few non-White principals: 98.41% were White, and less than one percent were Black ($N = 1$), Hispanic ($N = 1$), or American Indian ($N = 3$). Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the race of Iowa assistant principals and teachers, which also have not changed over time. These statistics reflect the population of the state at large which, according to the U.S. Census (Iowa Data Center, 2009), is 90.6% White (see Figure 6). The race of K–12 teachers in Iowa has not changed in the past ten years (Table 1): less than two percent of the state's teachers are not White.

Before becoming a school administrator in Iowa, a principal candidate must have three years experience as a teacher. Therefore, the composition of the pool of teachers (potential future administrators) is an instructive tool to ascertain the possibilities for future shifts in the demographics of school administrators. We wondered if the race of the teachers in Iowa is shifting the way the race of students has changed in the past 10 years. With respect to what we know about the leadership pipeline, we thought it would be important to also track the race of new-hire teachers to see if there is an influx of new, minority teachers being hired across the state (Figure 7).

Our analyses suggest that schools are not reacting to the changing enrollment demographics. Using zero years of “In District Experience” (Table 1) as a proxy for new hires, we found that the hiring practices of schools are not changing, despite the shift in the demographics of the student population. In fact, the race of the teachers does not match the race of the entire Iowa population, which is 7% non-White. It is quite possible that the applicant pool is also not reflective of the K–12 population, but our dataset does not allow for that kind of an interpretation.

Roles of Women in School Administration

The national trends for hiring women in educational administration have led the American Association of School Administrators to predict that by

Figure 3
Number of principals who are White and non-White from 1978–2008.

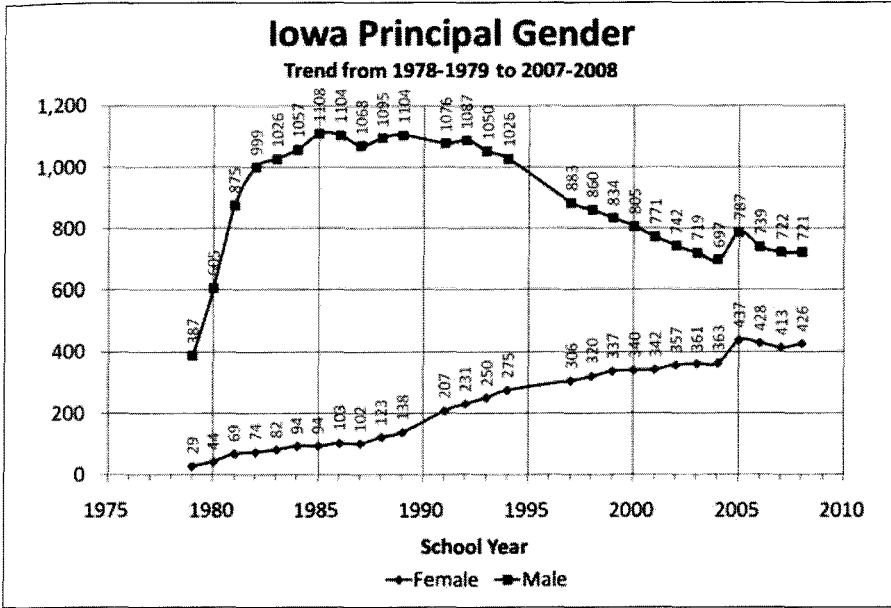


Figure 4
Number of assistant principals who are White and non-White from 1978–2008.

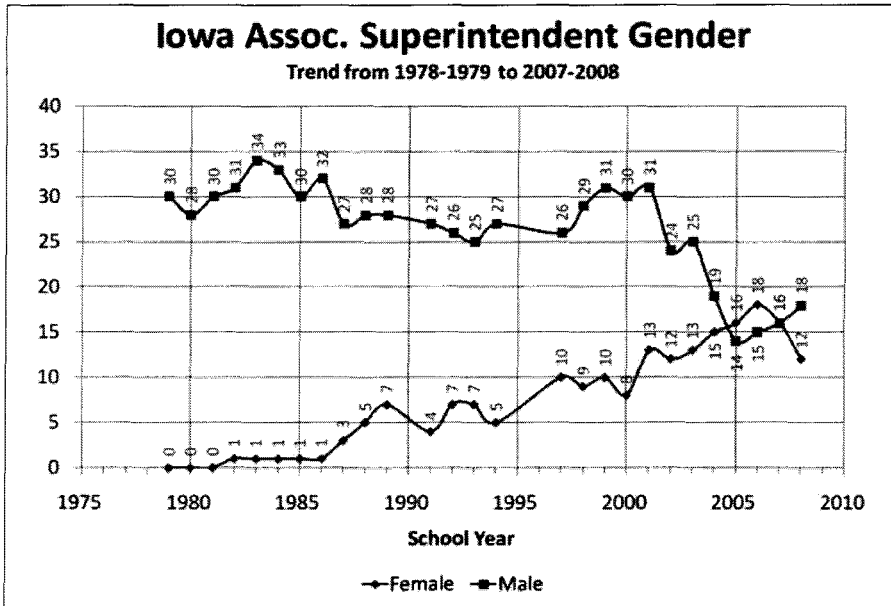


Figure 5
Number of teachers who are White and non-White from 1978–2008.

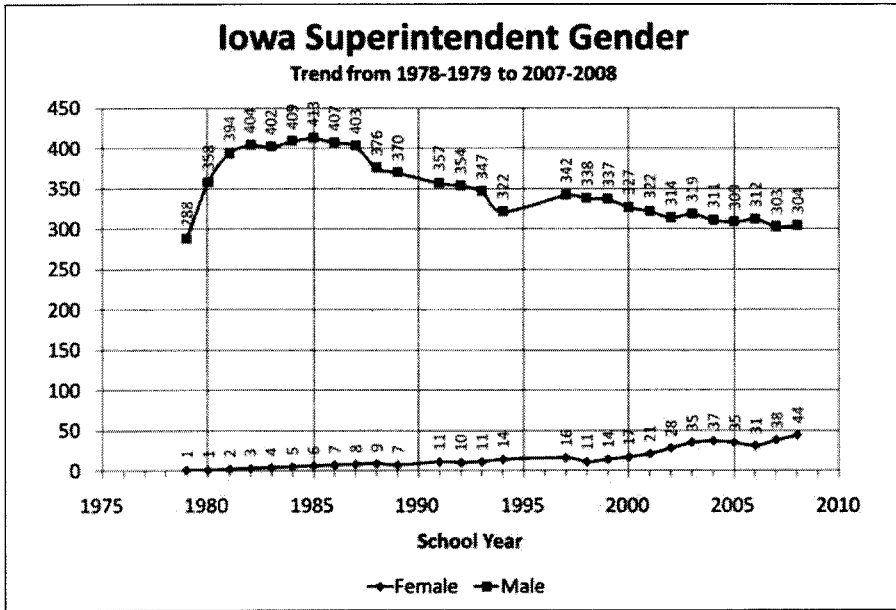


Figure 6
Trends in the percentage of White K–12 students, administrators, teachers, and the general population in Iowa from 1978–2008.

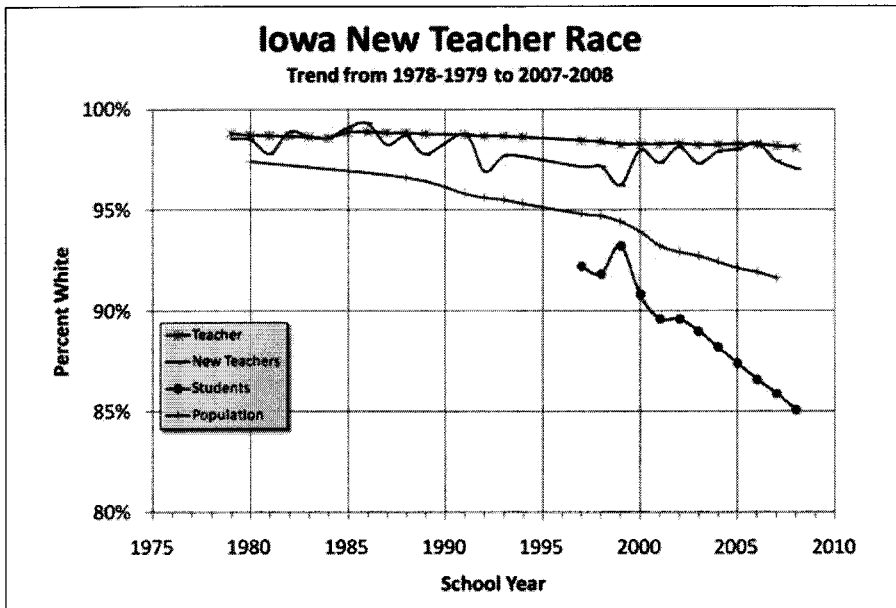


Figure 7

Trends in the percentage of White K-12 students, newly hired teachers, and the general population in Iowa from 1978-2008.

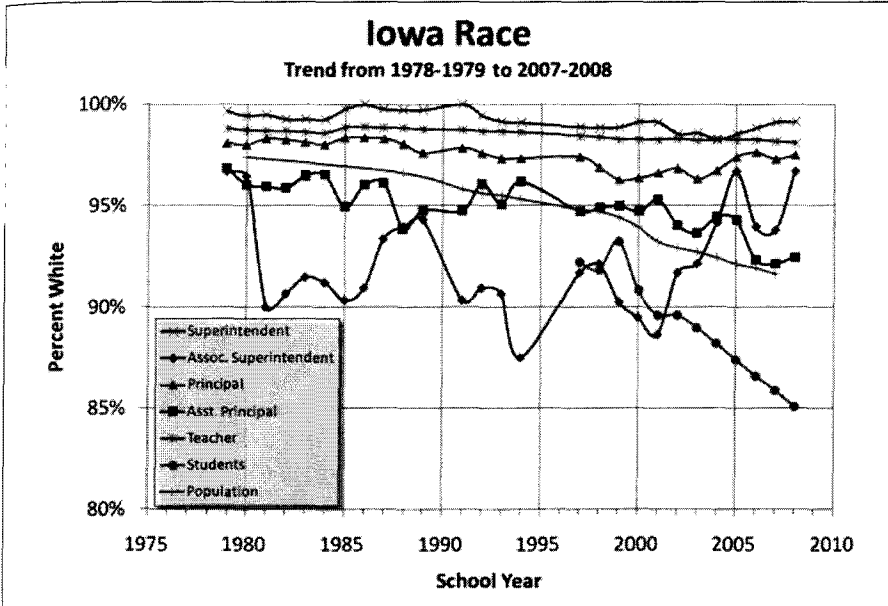
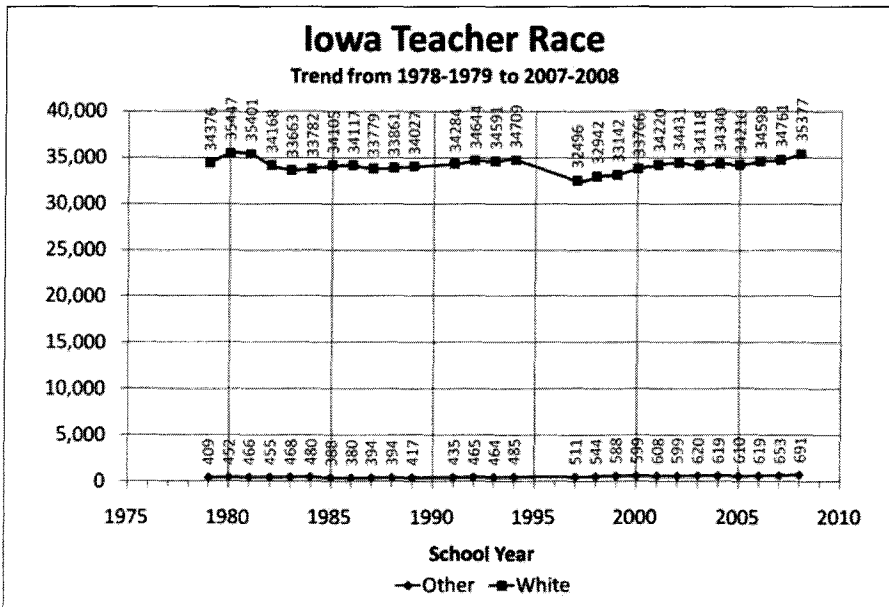


Figure 8

Number of superintendents who are female and male from 1978-2008.



the year 2010, women will represent 25–30% of American superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. 5). In 2007–08, only 44 out of 348 (13%) of Iowa's superintendents were women (see Figure 8). The numbers of men and women in the Associate Superintendency are more evenly distributed since 2001 (see Figure 9), a phenomenon that is explored more in depth later in this section. However, 62.9% of the 2007–2008 principals in the Iowa administrator database were men and 37.1% were women (Figure 10), and 29.1% of Iowa's K–12 Assistant Principal positions were held by women (Figure 11). Presumably, these women would be on track to move up from the principalship to the superintendency in rates that would match the national trend. What is more, in the 2007–08 school year, 74.4% of Iowa's K–12 teachers were female (Figure 12). Surely the potential for a pool of qualified women with school leadership experience as teacher leaders and as administrators exists in the state in numbers adequate to meet the national predicted average of 25–30% by 2010. In this section, we report the breakdowns of men and women in both principal jobs and teaching positions in an effort to explore the potential for equity in hiring Iowa teachers from the leadership pipeline into administrative positions.

In short, we found that women and men are hired at almost perfectly even rates as elementary school principals in Iowa: 50.52% male and 49.48% female. The differences in the teaching experiences by sex were consistent with our expectations that most elementary school teachers are women: 87% of the elementary school teachers in Iowa in the 2005–06 school year were women, and 12.8% were men.

In contrast, at the high school level, the percentage of male and female teachers is almost equal: 48.45% male and 51.55% female. However, the principals of Iowa high schools are predominantly male: 70.27% versus 29.73% female. One interesting trend we were able to see using the licensure data from the BOEE is that of the high school principals who had been P.E. teachers, 95.12% of them were male and 4.88% of them were female. Of the high school principals with a social studies certificate, 89.72% were men and 10.28% were women. So the curriculum experience of most male high school principals is in physical education and social studies, two subjects not tested under No Child Left Behind.

In an effort to understand if the rural or urban characteristics of the school were impacting the gender of the school leadership, we broke down the UEN schools by sex. We found that 53.55% of urban high schools had female principals and 46.67% male. This struck us as unusual, so we compared it to the breakdown of non-UEN schools in the state. In 2006–2007, 85.67% of the non-urban school principals were male and 14.33% were female. In other words, rural schools are hiring men as principals at the rate of 6:1, but urban schools in Iowa are closer to 1:1.

One of the most interesting shifts over time we discovered was in the sex of the Assistant Superintendents in Iowa. There are only 30 school districts in Iowa (out of 364) with an Associate Superintendent, and these are large school districts with more than one high school. Beginning in the

Figure 9
 Number of associate superintendents who are female and male from 1978–2008.

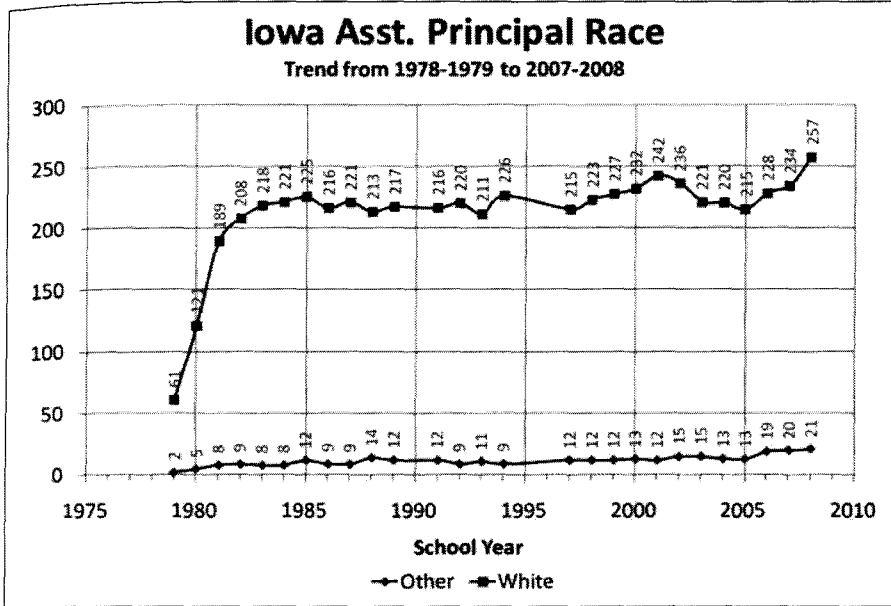


Figure 10
 Number of principals who are female and male from 1978–2008.

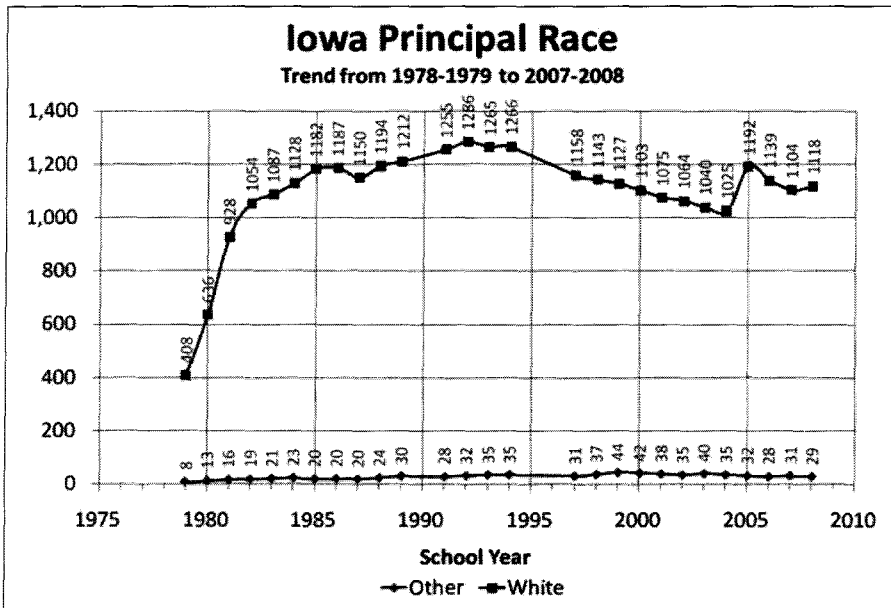


Figure 11
Number of assistant principals who are female and male from 1978–2008.

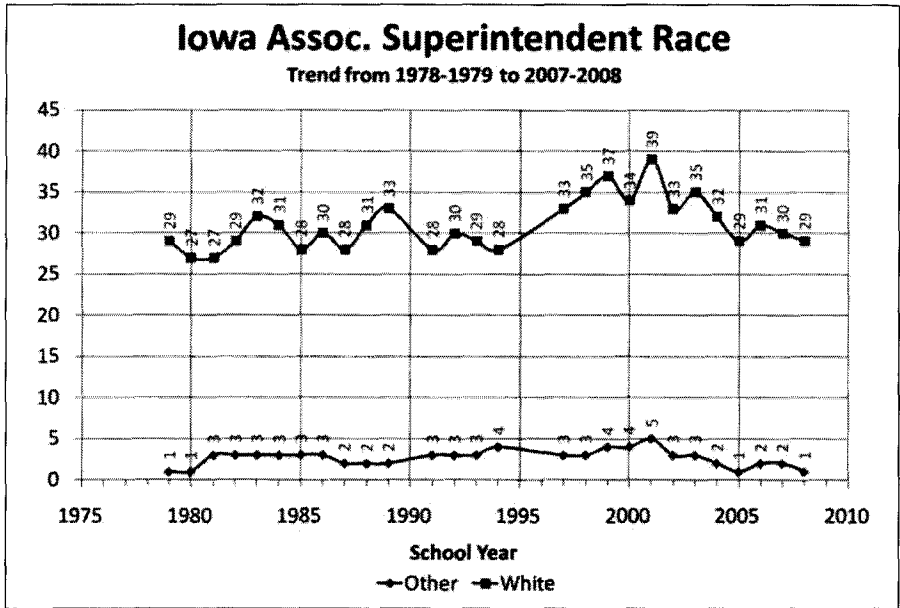


Figure 12
Number of teachers who are female and male from 1978-2008.

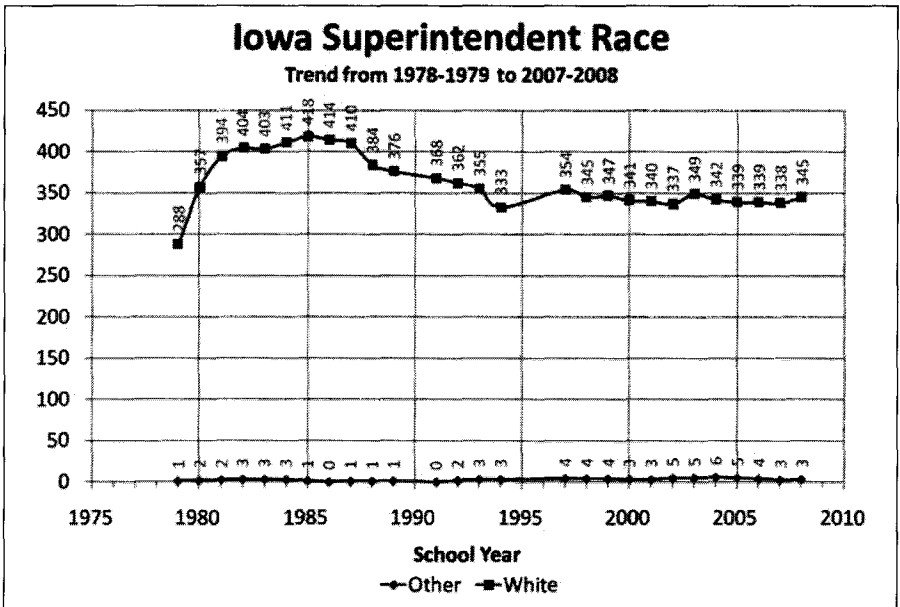


TABLE 2
Salary in 2007–2008 by Gender and Size of District.

District Enrollment	N		Total Salary (Mean)		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Difference
Superintendents					
< 250	21	6	65447	63067	2380
250–399	40	5	85489	87913	–2425
400–599	57	9	91611	94395	–2785
600–999	87	6	99897	99649	248
1000–2499	72	13	114190	116257	–2067
2500+	27	5	148703	173764	–25061
Principals					
< 250	28	19	67486	62546	4940
250–399	54	27	73824	65935	7889**
400–599	89	34	71238	67610	3627
600–999	144	54	74994	73541	1453
1000–2499	197	95	82330	76905	54266***
2500+	209	197	90925	88009	2916**
Assistant Principals					
< 250	0	1			
250–399	0	0			
400–599	0	0			
600–999	4	1			
1000–2499	55	10	69563	65019	4574
2500+	138	69	79703	78046	1657
Teachers					
< 250	146	532	36091	34393	1698*
250–399	406	1068	40867	37918	2949***
400–599	810	2081	42785	39446	3340***
600–999	1541	3735	45544	41736	3308***
1000–2499	2453	6883	48638	44727	3911***
2500+	3879	12534	50711	47701	3010***

Note: Total salary includes coaching. Differences are (Men–Women). Districts with enrollments fewer than 999 had insufficient numbers of Assistant Principals to report.

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

*** $p < 0.001$

2001–2002 school year, the percentage of men in the role of Associate Superintendent was the leadership position with the sharpest decrease (see Figure 9). We hypothesize that this is one of the side effects of No Child Left Behind: districts concerned with student achievement turned to the instructional and curriculum leaders in the district to manage the new requirements of the accountability policy, and these positions have typically been filled by women. As a follow up, we informally interviewed four women in leadership positions to both verify and help us understand the changes we were seeing in the data. One of them told us that in 2002, the pressure from school boards to raise test scores under No Child Left Behind began a statewide trend to “grab a skirt,” and many of the women who are now Associate or Assistant Superintendents are former Directors of Curriculum who were promoted to satisfy school boards wanting evidence of instructional leadership. The chief role of the Associate Superintendents in these larger school districts is to serve as a supervisor of K–12 curriculum articulation and assessment.

Salary

Table 2 illustrates the salaries for men and women in each leadership position. The differences in the total salary (men minus women) are listed in the right-hand column. When those differences were found to be statistically significant, we marked them with an asterisk. For the superintendency, the number of women is too small to pass the test of equal variances, so a one-tailed T-test yielded insignificant results. However, the superintendency is the only place where we found negative differences in total mean salary between men and women. If it is not a question of paying women enough to recruit them to the top positions in the large, urban districts, then why are there only 5 women and 27 men in those districts?

The answer may lie in an investigation of salaries and the leadership pipeline. Female educators in Iowa made consistently less money on average in the principal, assistant principal, and K–12 teacher positions than men. Teaching has not historically been a high paying job in Iowa. Before the Iowa legislature acted in 2007 to raise salaries, Iowa K–12 teacher salary ranked 40th in the nation, more than \$8,200 below the national mean; the increase raised teacher salary to 25th in the nation (Iowa State Education Association, 2007). However, when the salaries were raised in 2007, they were raised evenly across the board, without regard for the sex or race of the educators. As a result, any inequities that existed before 2007 would persevere under the new, higher pay scale.

Analysis and Recommendations

It appears that despite the fact that Iowa’s K–12 student population is becoming more racially diverse, the teachers and administrators of Iowa schools are still predominantly White. What is more, there is no indication that the pool of non-White teachers (and possible future administrators) is

growing in the state. White men still hold 87% of the state's top leadership positions, but an unintended consequence of No Child Left Behind is that more women are being hired as Associate and Assistant Superintendents to lead instructional reform movements, perhaps because the curriculum experiences of the men has been in physical education and social studies. The women who have risen to those levels of leadership in the large school districts hopefully are being groomed to move into the Superintendency in the future. The Assistant Superintendency must not become a glass ceiling for female school administrators.

As school boards consider the desired characteristics of the leadership teams, they should be cognizant of the role gender and race play, especially when the demographics of the student population are shifting. When we presented the preliminary results of this analysis at the November 2008 Summit on Gender Equity in the Iowa Superintendency in Ames, Iowa, participants were genuinely surprised that so few women had ascended to the superintendency, given the number of talented female principals in the state. This gender inequity in top leadership positions in both education and political settings is something to be analyzed, understood, and discussed.

Future research should include a qualitative investigation like the one conducted by Montz and Wanat (2008) into why female principals are not being hired as superintendents in the state and why rural schools hire male principals six times more often than urban schools in the same state. In addition, the phenomenon of women being paid substantially less than men to lead large, urban school districts should be further explored. Salary schedules for teachers are based on years of experience and education. Are women losing years of seniority for child raising? Are men adding to their total salaries with coaching and extracurricular advising opportunities that are unavailable to women?

The results of our study should be used to inform state education policy. For example, the state might benefit from a concerted policy aimed at creating parity in educator pay across all levels so that men are not consistently making more money than women doing the same jobs. In addition, the state might benefit from policies to recruit minority and female candidates for not only the superintendency, but also teacher and administrator preparation higher education programs, in an effort to diversify the pipeline with talented non-White educators. When the research base is telling us that the race of educators matters to the success of minority children, then it is imperative that the practice in the field be informed by that research. As the face of the K-12 students in Iowa change, so too must the teachers and the principals.

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