African American women superintendents: Their point of exit

Minta Maxine Downing
Eastern Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.emich.edu/theses
Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, and the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation
http://commons.emich.edu/theses/475

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses, and Doctoral Dissertations, and Graduate Capstone Projects at DigitalCommons@EMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@EMU. For more information, please contact lib-ir@emich.edu.
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS:
THEIR POINT OF EXIT

by

Minta Maxine Downing

Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Dissertation Committee:
Martha W. Tack, Ph.D., Chair
  James Berry, Ed.D.
  Patrick Melia, Ph.D.
  Jaclynn Tracy, Ph.D.

March 6, 2009
Ypsilanti, Michigan
DEDICATION

A proud, inner gratefulness resides deep in my soul for all of the strong and influential African American women who have passed through my life, each leaving a remarkably different and deeply ingrained footprint in my life’s path.

I am truly the product of a small northeast Alabama village that encompassed the home, the community, the school, and the church. The nurturing and foundation of curiosity, enthusiasm, and a burning desire always to accomplish more was provided first by my mother, the late Alice Louise Williams, and cemented by my aunt, Dorothy Ann Williams (Miss D. A.), who was the first in our family to receive the bachelor’s and master’s degrees.

Aunt Dorothy began her 44–year teaching career in the K–12 public education system of Northport, Alabama. As an educator, humanitarian, and activist who stood up for her beliefs as well as the rights of African American children and women, she continues today to serve as a powerful and positive role model whose faith in my ability to succeed in any chosen endeavor has never waned.

My journey continues to carry their footprints of love, strength, compassion, encouragement, and confidence.

To them I dedicate this research.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Through the years as my soul awakened with the dawning of each new day, I, too, had dared to dream a never fading, secret dream: to achieve the highest educational pinnacle, the doctorate. The more public my dream, the more hands embraced my dream and me. I stand not at the top of this mountain without having had the help of myriad extraordinary hands and hearts of very special people. Although all are not named herein, I give praise to the countless, fantastic people on my journey!

No words can really describe or express to Dr. Martha Tack, my professor, chair person, mentor, and friend, the tremendous amount of infinite, sincere gratitude and deep appreciation contained within my heart for the immense and numerous contributions she has made to and for me throughout this dissertation process. On my journey, the esteemed Dr. Tack walked the walk and talked the talk with me giving freely of her time, much constructive criticism, encouragement, support, overall guidance, unrelenting in her high standards.

I am extremely indebted to the other scholarly members of my dissertation committee who remained committed to me throughout the process. Dr. Jaclynn Tracy, with her friendly but serious smile and gentle push, never faltered or skipped a step in her assistance. Dr. Patrick Melia provided valuable suggestions and feedback that added to the richness of the final product; and the late Dr. Helen Ditzhazy’s enthusiasm for my project never diminished. To Dr. James Berry, I am especially thankful as he stepped in to complete my committee and to provide his valuable insight.
Without the 8 phenomenal African American women who had served as K–12 public school superintendents, this particular research could not have been accomplished. In retrospect, I remain tremendously impressed that these awesome women took time from their busy lives to talk with me. Their shared stories are this dissertation, and within me is a profound as well as genuine gratefulness for their extreme kindness and interest.

Immeasurable is my thanks to special members of my cohort, especially Dr. April Flanagan, who so willingly continued to give of her time and advice; the Doctoral Fellows, Drs. Nan-Chi Tiao and Kevin Brandon; members of the Dissertation Support Group, Drs. Pamela Becker and Cheryl Hanewicz, Deb Havens, as well as others; Sally Rosales, who assisted and bailed me out time and time again; and Zena Lowe, who fervently insisted that I, along with her, submit application to the doctoral program at Eastern Michigan University. These persons and others provided me a willing and supportive academic community in addition to connections to a wealth of information, experiences, and knowledge from different perspectives.

The inspiration and the encouragement from family members and friends may have been but a special word or a hug, the effects of which lasted through the early morning hours as I truly toiled to uncover the richness buried in the literature and participants’ interviews. To my dearest family whose love helped them overlook and understand my outbursts, my irritability, I owe a “world” of thanks and deep appreciation with much love. Through the years, my husband, Ronald, became even more loving and supportive, providing assistance on all levels. In addition to arranging my travel and accommodations to the interviews, my sister Denise’s and
my daughter Angelita’s unfailing rallying cries indicated that no matter what I said, they knew that I could accomplish this difficult task. My son-in-law, Jaison, became my personal technological expert, rescuing my work and me from the brink of computer disaster. No matter the obstacles, they all believed in me and in my ability to finish successfully this journey.
ABSTRACT

Only recently have scholars paid attention to the African American woman superintendent who is an anomaly in this powerful leadership position in public education. Additionally, only a few academicians have asked why talented African American women who successfully obtain the superintendency exit the position so quickly. The primary purpose of this phenomenological focused qualitative study was to identify and document the experiences contributing to the decisions of selected former African American women superintendents to exit, voluntarily or involuntarily, their public school superintendencies and not to seek another one, choosing instead to pursue other positions, either in education or in a totally different field.

Through confidential, personal interviews, using an open-ended, semi-structured interview guide, data were collected from 7 former African American women superintendents and 1 current African American woman superintendent who had previously exited her first superintendency. Once the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed and the transcripts authenticated by each participant, analysis was completed using the steps suggested by Creswell (1998) in his spiral analysis and by Boyatzis (1996) in his proposed process of thematic analysis.

Corroborated by an external auditor, the resulting analysis and stories evolved from thorough examination of these topical areas included in the research questions: factors causing their exit from the superintendency; perceptions and descriptions of their superintendent experiences; impact of race and/or gender on their superintendency; advice for African American women about career preparation, experiences, competencies; and overall guidance related to achieving longevity in the
superintendency. These 8 competent and accomplished African American women educators revealed that their exits were influenced by various “pushes” and “pulls” described in the dissertation. The researcher also identified categories as well as themes and presented 8 signal conclusions drawn from participant interviews.

The dissertation culminates with 3 recommendations for research and 10 recommendations for practice. The first 6 recommendations for practice focus on membership requirements and mandatory training as well as continued professional development for service as a local school board member. The last 4 practice recommendations relate to professional associations, incumbent and aspiring African American women superintendents, university administrators, and university faculty members in educational leadership programs.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.................................................................................................i

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.................................................................................ii

ABSTRACT.....................................................................................................v

LIST OF TABLES..........................................................................................xii

LIST OF FIGURES........................................................................................xiii

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND......................................1

  Scarcity of Research..................................................................................2
  Lack of a Nationwide All-Inclusive Disaggregated Database.......................6
  Statement of the Problem..........................................................................14
  Purpose of the Study................................................................................16
  Significance of the Study..........................................................................16
  Overview of the Research Methodology..................................................17
  Delimitations of the Study........................................................................18
  Definition of Terms..................................................................................19
  Organization of the Dissertation..............................................................20

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.................................21

  The Early Years: 1619–1865....................................................................22
    Higher Education for African American Women.......................................29
    Selected Post-Bellum African American Women Administrators.............34
    Selected Post-Bellum African American Women School Founders..........36
    The Jeanes Supervisors..........................................................................38
African American Women Superintendents

Profile

“Messiahs, Scapegoats, or Sacrificial Lambs”

Challenges

Exiting the Superintendency

Summary

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Research Design

Protection of the Rights of Human Subjects and Informed Consent

Phenomenological Focus

Critical Race Theory

The Role of the Researcher

Research Procedures

Phase One: The Pilot Study

Process

Pilot-Study Participants

Pilot-Study Feedback

Phase Two: Selection of Research Participants

Process

Phase Three: Data Collection

The Research Interview

Phase Four: Data Analysis
Thematic Analysis

Credibility

CHAPTER 4: EXPERIENCES SHAPING THEIR SUPERINTENDENCIES

Demographic Profile of Participants

Their Lived Experiences

Dr. Jasmine Cartier

The Death Threat

The Horse Holder

Standing Up to the Bully

Earning Her Stripes

With Staff

With Colleagues

With Union Members

Dr. Lenise Busby

Dangerous Assumptions

Unmarked Hazards

Making a Real Difference

Adapting to the Culture

Dr. Bella Jacoby

Should Have Gone to the Press

Dr. Nia Reynolds

“Politricks” 101

Dr. Jai Rosewood
Who’s the Boss?.................................................................126

Dr. Ashia Whiting..............................................................129

Knowing When to Say “Yes”..............................................129

Dr. Iris Melane.................................................................131

Strapped Down with Double Standards…………………..131

Dr. Denise Tarrington.........................................................132

No Deterrents to Her Success...........................................133

Summary..............................................................................134

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF EMERGENT THEMES..135

Exiting....................................................................................135

Pulls.....................................................................................136

Other Mountains to Climb.................................................136

Doing the Things I Had Come to Do...............................138

Regaining Control of My Life.............................................139

On My Own Terms: Letting the Exit Happen...............142

Pushes..................................................................................144

Fighting an Uphill Battle: Corrupt, Dysfunctional, Racist,
Undermining, and Micromanaging Boards of Education......144

Exercising Caution: Politics at Work.........................146

Leadership...........................................................................148

Qualities of the Women in the Position......................149

Effectiveness......................................................................151

Remembering Their Legacies............................................153

Their Passion for the Position: Motivation Behind the Ascent……158
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Comparison of Association of American School Administrators’ Studies by Selected Categories</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Number of African American Women Superintendents as Compared to Women Superintendents</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Research on Exiting Superintendents</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Percentage of Women in the Superintendency in Selected Years</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Key Categories of Recommendations from Former African American Women Superintendents</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Societal Changes in Critical Areas</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Aspiration to the Superintendency: Personal Development</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Aspiration to and Retention in the Superintendency: Academic Preparation/Professional Development</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Aspiration to the Superintendency: Board of Education Responsibilities</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Retention in the Superintendency: Personal Development</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Retention in the Superintendency: Board of Education Responsibilities</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Given that the duties of the public school superintendent have become increasingly more difficult and that the student population is more “racially and ethnically diverse than it was 10, 20, or 30 years ago” (Vail, 2001, p. 39), why would members of boards of education not tap into a previously underutilized source of talented educators (i.e., women of all ethnicities) for their superintendents? Based on the views of the respondents in nationwide studies of the superintendency during the past 14 years, the number of women leading school districts nationally increased from 6.6% in 1992 (Glass, 1992), to 13.4% in 2000 (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000), to 18% in 2003 (Grogan & Brunner, 2005), and to 21.7% in 2006 (Glass & Franceschinis, 2007). In 2000, Glass, Bjork, and Brunner found that 94.9% of superintendents were White and that 86.6% were men, while 5.1% were African American women, 1.3% Hispanic women, and 0.7% Native American/Asian American women. Glass and Franceschinis (2007) indicated that 93.8% of superintendents were White and that 78.3% were men. Of the 18% women superintendents leading 13,728 school districts in 2003, 93% were White, 4.4% African American, 1.0% Hispanic, 1.2% Native American, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.1% other (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Such numbers indicate that minority women remain under-represented and White men continue to dominate the public school superintendency.

The scarcity of African American women superintendents parallels the paucity of the research and scholarship about this demographic. With such vital research at a minimum, scholars need to address not only the issues that affect African American women’s lack of ascent to this pivotal position, but also retention issues of this specific population. As Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993) asserted:

Little attention has been given to issues of retention—that is to understanding the multiple factors related to whether or not women remain in these key positions.
Retention deals with women already trained, contributing to the profession, and proven capable of negotiating the career pathways more frequently traveled and shaped by men. (p. 1)

In sum, with more African American women achieving appointments to the superintendency, the significant events experienced by even one superintendent who exited the position—voluntarily or involuntarily, without seeking another superintendency—could provide the necessary tools for incumbents and aspirants to navigate successfully the political, economical, and social terrains of superintendency.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the scarcity of research pertaining to African American women superintendents in addition to the impact that having no nationwide database about the superintendency has on scholars. In subsequent sections, the author clarifies the problem this research addressed and provides information about the following aspects of this qualitative dissertation: statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, overview of the research methodology, delimitations of the study, definition of terms, and the organization of this dissertation.

Scarcity of Research

As an educational leader, the African American woman has experienced “a landscape dominated by a culture of privileged, white, male leadership which sets the standards and norms of the education profession” (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995, p. 15). Such continued domination appears to have had a major impact on the direction of research in the superintendency since the literature largely represents the views of White male superintendents. In fact, the African American woman’s ascent to the position of superintendent of public school districts has yet to produce a preponderance of educational research literature specifically about her. Perkins (1987) argued that the
availability of the traditional primary sources normally utilized in history places severe limitations on researchers investigating the contributions African American women have made to American education” (p. 2). According to Allen, Jacobson, and Lometey (1995), “There is precious little research about African American women in their professional aspirations, their goals, and the obstacles they confront as they pursue their goals . . .” (p. 409). Moreover, Perkins (1987) noted, “This omission reflects the lack of significance that African Americans in general, and African American women in particular, have been accorded in United States history” (p. 2).

Several shortcomings characterize the few pieces of educational research literature addressing women superintendents. First, researchers usually reference White women. Additionally, in noting the use of the phrase “people of color” in the research, Bjork and Rodgers (1999) indicated that such terminology “cloaks wide ethnic and racial diversity” (p. 5), providing researchers with a gigantic umbrella under which to collect data. However, when the word “women” is added to the phrase, as in “women and people of color,” the word “women” generally refers to White women. When the word “Blacks” is added to the phrase, as in “women and Blacks,” the word “Blacks” generally refers to Black men. Hooks (1981) observed that “No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women” (p. 7). In fact, Doughty (1977) argued that the Black woman superintendent, in general, is statistically invisible; “nobody knows her name” (p. 3). Finally, the usage of the word “minorities” in research often fails to note if both women and men are included and which ethnic and/or racial groups constitute the “minority.”
Most of the research specific to African American women superintendents has been generated through unpublished doctoral dissertations of which only approximately 18 were completed between 1985 and 2008. Researchers focused on a multiplicity of issues that resulted in numerous themes and findings. Concerns addressed included the following: social conditions of African American women superintendents (Williams, 2007), mentoring effects on their career development (January, 2008), resiliency (Daye, 2007), the perception of self-efficacy and leadership type (Watt, 1995), career paths (Bulls, 1986; Revere, 1985), the relationship of self-efficacy to career performance (Hosier, 2002), accessing the superintendency (Johnson, 2006), commonalities and constraints (Fields, 2006), documented experiences of Black women superintendents (Barrens-Alexander, 2000, Herring, 2007; Kennedy, 2008), race and gender effects on the superintendency (Johnson, 2006), race and gender barriers in accessing the superintendency (Rowan, 2006), descriptive characteristics and problems of African American women superintendents (Newton, 2003), an examination of how Black women superintendents’ personal and professional lives defined their action and commitment to creating just and equitable learning environments (Sanders-Lawson, 2001), barriers faced by African American women enroute to the superintendency as well as those confronting the same women as superintendents (Vaughn, 2008), and factors contributing to job separation (Rivers, 2007).

These studies revealed varied results particular to African American women superintendents. For example, the majority of the 22 participants in Revere’s (1985) study indicated that sex discrimination often manifested through the belief that the woman was not “equipped to handle the job” (p. 127), and that the individuals who made
decisions (school board members) showed “biased and racist attitudes” (p. 127). Revere’s (1985) research also revealed that no single career pattern had propelled the African American women to the superintendency and that the strengths of these women superintendents were tenaciousness, assertiveness, industriousness, and endurance. Other researchers documented that the women superintendents had supportive networks of family, mentors, co-workers, and friends (Adams, 1990; Barrens-Alexander, 2000; Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Watt, 1995); that role models and mentors were deemed extremely vital to career advancement (Adams, 1990; Bulls, 1986; Watt, 1995) while the absence of both posed barriers (Alston, 1996); and that their connection to the African American Baptist Church as well as their spirituality were sustaining forces (Barrens-Alexander, 2000; Sanders-Lawson, 2001). According to Sanders-Lawson, being spiritually grounded provided the four women in her study with a source of inner strength that helped sustain them through stressful and conflictual situations in their superintendencies. Other researchers looked at how poor positioning in the career track imposed limitations on African American women educators’ professional advancement (Celestin, 2003; Jones, 1999; Revere, 1985).

In order to provide information about African American women administrators, inclusive of superintendents, some researchers have reported results based on small numbers of African American women participants at various other administrative levels within the larger context of women in administration (Adell, 2004; Adkison, 1981; Alligood, 2005; Bell & Chase, 1992; Boone-Wooten, 2004; Braddom, 1988; Bradley-White, 1997; Bush, 2000; Celestin, 2003; Chambers, 1979; Collins, 2002; Dunlop, 1997; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Harrison-Williams, 2000; Henson-Governor, 1998;
Jones, 1984; Jones-Mitchell, 1993; Ragin, 2004; Regan, 2001; Scinto, 2006; Williams, 2007). Some scholars have tended to treat African American women’s “concerns in much the same manner as those of other women, most often Hispanics” (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995, p. 409), which generally indicated an overall inattentiveness to the concerns of both African American and Hispanic women. In addition, several scholars (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980; Blount, 1998; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Hansot & Tyack, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1989) researched women educational administrators and provided data in several areas (e.g., historical overview of women in education and in educational administration, under-representation of, barriers to advancement, profiles, and career paths) regarding women in education at various levels of leadership. Although inclusive of African American women in education, each study was quite limited in its treatment of this special segment of women. Shakeshaft (1989) explained that “Understanding the movement of Black women into school administration up to 1930 is more difficult because not as much information that documents or compiles these experiences is available . . .” (p. 34). Furthermore, Perkins (1987) pointed out:

> Although Black women have been prominent in most facets of American life, their role in the education of their race has been their most salient contribution . . . . The hardships and struggles these women encountered in obtaining an education and later in transmitting their learning to others remain an untold story. (pp. 3–4)

Lack of a Nationwide, All-Inclusive Disaggregated Database

Personnel in the National Education Association’s Department of the Superintendency conducted national surveys in 1923 and 1933 for the purpose of “compiling demographic profiles, opinions on key educational issues, and what constituted best practices in the superintendency” (Glass, 2000, p. III). Hentges (1982)
noted that the 1923 survey, *The Status of the Superintendent*, concentrated on city superintendents, “focused on men and appeared to be addressed to men” (p. 27). Although the ensuing 1933 survey, *Educational Leadership*, also embraced rural superintendents, the questionnaire remained male-focused. Because of World War II, no survey was conducted in the 1940s.

Beginning with the 1952 survey, *The American School Superintendent*, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has sponsored surveys of the superintendency known as the “Ten-Year Studies” (Glass, 2000, p. III). Subsequent studies—*Profile of the School Superintendent, 1960; The American School Superintendent, 1971; The American School Superintendent in 1982; The 1992 Study of the American School Superintendency; and The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency: A Look at the Superintendency in the New Millennium*—have varied in content, direction, sampling techniques, and issues. According to Glass (1992), each study always “defines the superintendency, identifies who the superintendents are, and what they do in their school districts” (p. 5). Continuing AASA’s tradition of providing updated information for and about superintendents and their leadership in diverse-sized school districts, the authors’ main focus in *The State of the School Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study* lay in “the rapid rate of change and effects [on the superintendency] resulting from state accountability programs and No Child Left Behind legislation” (Glass & Franceschini, 2007, p. xi).

According to Hummel (1982), the 1982 AASA study of the superintendency was the first to include previously excluded “special subgroup populations such as females and minorities” (p. 93), but noticeably absent was the racial make-up of the “minorities”
and information on female superintendents disaggregated by race. Brunner (2003) asserted that, “While the American Association of School Administrators did not include chapters on women until 1982 and persons of color until 2000, the AASA has published separate records on women and persons of color since 1983” (p. 444).

Under the sponsorship of the AASA, and with the assistance of Xenia Montenegro, Effie Jones (1983) spearheaded additional research on women and minority school administrators. With the intent of providing missing and more complete data on women and minority school administrators, the initial survey, *Perspectives on Racial Minority and Women School Administrators*, was released in 1983, with subsequent updated publications in 1985, 1988, 1990, and 1993. Although these surveys used limited information collected by officials in state departments of education, in Jackson’s (1999) opinion, the reports contained data unavailable and sometimes unobtainable elsewhere.

A review of *Perspectives on Racial Minority and Women School Administrators* (Jones & Montenegro, 1983), *Women and Minorities in School Administration* (Jones & Montenegro, 1985), and *Women and Racial Minority Representation in School Administration* (Montenegro, 1993) revealed findings on women in five levels of leadership (e.g., superintendent, assistant superintendent, principal, assistant principal, and a combined category of other administrative positions). As noted in Table 1, the findings published in the 1993 survey were not disaggregated into separate racial minorities by gender.
Table 1

Comparison of AASA’s Studies by Selected Categories: Office of Minority Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Study</th>
<th>Female Superintendents by Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male Superintendents by Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 (Note 1)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 (Note 2)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983 (Note 3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Data were not disaggregated by gender or ethnicity. **Data for men were not collected in this study.

However, as displayed in Table 1, the superintendency results from the 1985 study were disaggregated by both ethnicity and gender. The 1983 study reported only women in the superintendency by ethnicity. Neither the racial/ethnicity nor minority reports in 1983 or in 1993 were disaggregated by gender; the 1993 findings, including the percentage of women at each leadership level, were not disaggregated by racial
minorities. For example, in 1993 women composed 7.1% of the superintendencies, as shown in Figure 1.

![Percentage of Women in the Superintendency in Selected Years](image)

**Figure 1.** Percentages in Selected Years


Unfortunately, the percentages in Figure 1 were not disaggregated by racial minorities. The racial minorities’ report indicated that in 1993, 0.1% of the superintendents were Asians or Pacific Islanders, 1.5% were Black, 1.5% were Hispanic, and 0.5% were American Indian (Montenegro, 1993). The 1993 report of racial minorities in the superintendency indicated a small increase in minority superintendents, but data were not disaggregated by either ethnicity or gender. For example, in 1981–82,
2.2% of the superintendents were from a racial minority (Montenegro, 1993, p. 4). By 1992–93, this percentage had increased to 3.5% (Montenegro, 1993, p. 4).

Interestingly, in *The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency*, boasting its largest sample ever (i.e., 2,262 superintendents including 297 females, 15 of whom were Black women), the author observed:

1. The exact number of superintendents in public school districts was unknown.
2. Of the 57 statistical tables contained in Chapter 6, “Female Superintendents,” the only statistical table disaggregated by race and gender was Table 6:2, Numbers by Race.
3. The remaining 56 tables in Chapter 6 were disaggregated by “male” and “female.”
4. Of the 50 statistical tables contained in Chapter 7, “Ethnic Minority Superintendents,” the only statistical table disaggregated by race and gender was Table 7:1, Ethnicity by Gender.
5. The remaining 49 tables in Chapter 7 were disaggregated by “non-minority” and “minority” (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

Even more interesting was the deficit in data compiled and reported in AASA’s 2007 *State of the Superintendency: A Mid-Decade Study*, which continued the void in research findings being disaggregated by race and gender. Of the 121 charts, tables, and graphs contained within this study, 9 were disaggregated by “male” and “female,” while 3 presented statistical data by ethnicity.

Characterizing the AASA as a “national organization that represents and supports all superintendents at the national level, inclusive of policy development,” (p. 445)
Brunner (2003) made this observation about the resulting publication of the AASA 10-year study: “The discourse it generates is not only powerful, but also represents the norms of the profession—norms that at this point provide role models almost exclusively for White men” (p. 445). Brunner (2003), one of the authors of *The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency*, critiqued her own work on the study by focusing on these three issues:

1. The invisibility and lack of discourse that resulted from the published data about women and persons of color.

2. The limitations of the discourse that resulted from the published data relative to women and persons of color.

3. The generation and emergence of new discourse that resulted from the published data relative to women and persons of color. (p. 431)

Furthermore, she, too, noted that the absence of disaggregated data on women and persons of color made them invisible. Brunner (2003) emphasized the overwhelming importance of having “full reports of disaggregated data” (p. 444) in future studies addressing the general population of the superintendency.

Other scholars have previously voiced their concerns about missing disaggregated data on women superintendents. For example, Hansot and Tyack (1981) wrote:

In statistical reports the NEA and most other agencies stopped breaking down tables by sex at the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. Amid the proliferation of other kinds of statistical reporting in an age enamored of numbers—reports so detailed that one could give the precise salary of staff in every community across the country and the exact information on all sorts of other variables—data by sex became strangely inaccessible. A conspiracy of silence could hardly have been more unintentional. A result of this failure to record by gender, those who took an interest in what was happening to women in school administration and to comparative male and female salaries had to compile figures laboriously from scattered sources. (p. 13)
Noting the assortment of the number of women in school administration reported by various writers, Shakeshaft (1994) argued that “sloppy scholarship” is not the rationale behind the absence of data on women in educational administration (p. 357).

Furthermore, Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999) asserted:

We need a regular, professionally staffed and reported survey of both the people in the superintendency and an analysis of the pool from which future superintendents will be selected. Once a decade is not enough. The federal education department is tasked to report regularly on the condition of American education. Such reports would almost by definition have to include information on the people who function as the CEOs of our schools. It is crystal clear to the authors that the National Center for Education Statistics needs to add data on the superintendents of schools to its Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) database to fulfill its mission. (p. 6)

A review of selected publications of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), The Condition of Education, 2008, the 2003–2004 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), and the Digest of Education Statistics, 2008, revealed no information about superintendents in any of the charts or tables. Since the NCES is the “primary federal entity fulfilling a congressional mandate to collect, collate, analyze, and report full and complete statistics on the condition of education in the United States” (Livingston & Wirt, 2004, p. 4), the lack of information about the persons who function as the chief executive officers of the nation’s schools is perplexing.

Blount (1998) also commented on the limited number of studies focused on the totality of the superintendent population. In fact, Blount stated that “none [study] has been undertaken in a systematic, on-going fashion over the course of the century (20th). As a result, the accurate historical data describing the number of women superintendents has been noticeably missing in discussions about superintendent employment trends” (p. 171).
In 2003, following a 10-year hiatus, “to gather the most up-to-date, comprehensive information” (Grogan & Brunner, 2005, p. 46), AASA finally endorsed a nationwide study to address the void of data on and about women in the superintendency and in central office positions. Of the identified 2,500 women superintendents and 3,000 women in positions of assistant superintendents or higher, 723 women superintendents and 472 central office administrators participated in this study. Of the women superintendents, 93% were White, 4.4% African American, 1.0% Hispanic, 1.2% Native American, 0.1% Pacific Islander, and 0.1% other (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

The results of AASA’s 2003 nationwide study of women superintendents and central office administrators were presented in Brunner and Grogan’s (2007) book *Women Leading School Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*. In Chapter 6, key findings were presented (i.e., career paths, professional development, personal as well as professional demographics, perceived barriers limiting administrative opportunities) that described women-of-color in the superintendency. Of the 95 useable surveys from women-of-color, 50 were from superintendents; 65% identified themselves as African American, “17% as Hispanic, 13% as Native American, 2% as Asian, and 1% as Pacific Islander” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 110). Thus, “women-of-color” was the umbrella term for members of these ethnic groups under which the results of Brunner and Grogan’s (2007) study were reported.

Statement of the Problem

The silence is deafening. Thus, “about the only thing researchers know with any certainty about African American women in the superintendency is that there are not many of them” (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1996, p. 409). The few African American
women who have “defied the odds”—5.1% of the women participants in the recent 2000 *Study of the American Public School Superintendent* (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000)—are anomalies among the approximately 11,744 (86.5%) White male superintendents who have dominated the superintendency since its inception (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Related to the inequitable under-representation of African American women superintendents are these six critical issues:

1. The dearth of information regarding the experiences chronicling their journeys to the superintendency, which deprives African American women aspiring to the position of invaluable information;

2. The lack of a “reliable, uniform nationwide database that confirms just how many women are school administrators and at what level” (Shakeshaft, 1994, p. 357). Reiterating the lack of such data, Shakeshaft continued:

   If we do not have annual comparisons by sex and race, it is difficult to know whether things are improving, getting worse, or staying the same . . . justification for action is difficult; it becomes more difficult to identify, and to remedy, the condition of the under use of women in schools (pp. 357–358);

3. Appointed as the “messiah, scapegoat, or sacrificial lamb” (Hill & Ragland, 1995, pp. 20–22), superintendents are in “poorly maintained and badly managed urban school districts” (Alston, 1999, p. 83);

4. Internal and external challenges to superintendent effectiveness; and

5. The volatile point of exit, the point where a major party of the “iron triangle” (i.e., school board, teacher union, and/or central office staff) interacted negatively, where tightrope walking with special-interest groups or political pressure conflicted, or where the inability to further the educative processes for the children clashed with everyone else’s agenda (Fuller, Campbell, Cello,
Harvey, Immerwaht, & Winger, 2003), compelling the African American woman superintendent to walk away abruptly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify and document the experiences that contributed to the decisions of selected former African American women superintendents to exit, voluntarily or involuntarily, their public school superintendencies and not seek another one, choosing instead to pursue other positions either in education or in a different field. The impact of race and gender on their career decisions was explored and an assessment was made of other challenges that these former superintendents encountered as well as their strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

Significance of the Study

This research will significantly contribute to the appallingly limited body of knowledge focused specifically on African American women public school superintendents. The scarceness of available research indicates the need for the continuing, ongoing exploration of the various experiences of African American women superintendents. Providing an opportunity for the voices of former African American women superintendents to be heard will allow aspiring women superintendents to have access to a unique body of knowledge. These research findings, evidenced through rich stories, will ground the understanding of a leadership different in culture and context. In the powerful male-dominated domain of the public school superintendency, the awareness of issues brought to the forefront through this research will provide an
opportunity for African American women aspirants to be better prepared for this unequaled educational yet political position.

Consequently, potential and incumbent African American women superintendents will have additional tools to assist them not only in withstanding job pressure, but also in succeeding, sustaining, and retaining their positions longer. “With the currently low numbers, the loss of any potential or seated African American woman superintendent must be avoided at all cost” (Barrens-Alexander, 2000, p. 10). The moving force to engage in this study was the opportunity to understand the totality of experiences encountered by African American women as chief executive officers of public school districts.

Overview of the Research Methodology

This phenomenological focused qualitative research was based on confidentially recorded personal interviews with African American women, seven of whom have served nationally as urban and suburban public school superintendents and one whose incumbency continues. Following approval of the research by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Board (Appendix A), the purposeful sampling process commenced with the selection of participants who could provide rich information about their lived superintendent experience. Once identified, these African American women received a letter endorsing the study from a nationally known African American educator, followed by personal contact either via telephone and/or email. The African American women who agreed to participate in this research received, in addition to the formal letter of invitation (Appendix B), an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) and an interview guide (Appendix D). As the primary research instrument, the researcher
collected data through seven face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview using open-ended interview questions, pilot tested for perspicuousness and thoroughness prior to entrance into the field with three incumbent African American women superintendents.

Following validation by participants of their interview transcripts, their stories were analyzed by this writer to identify emergent patterns and themes. To provide anonymity and confidentiality to participants throughout this part of the research process, extreme care was taken while dealing with personal contact information, transcribing the interviews, and listening to the interview tapes. Each step in this process was personally handled by the researcher. Pseudonyms were assigned not only to participants but also to their school districts, cities, states, and other possible means of identification. In the researcher’s home, all sensitive materials regarding the study were kept under lock-and-key.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited first by the selection of the participants. Since the primary objective was to obtain facts, opinions, and insights of a specific underrepresented public school administrative population, this study was delimited to former African American women superintendents within the United States who exited the position, voluntarily or involuntarily. Second, the select number of potential participants and the uniqueness of individual experiences will not allow the research findings to be generalized or transferred to other women superintendents (e.g., Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or White) or to other chief executive officer positions in other professions.
Definition of Terms

To clarify their meaning for the purpose of this study, several key terms were defined as follows:

African American refers to a Black American of African descent, born, reared, and living in the United States.

Exiter refers to “a person who has been a superintendent in one or more school districts, has a number of years left in a normal career span, and for one or more reasons, has selected alternate career moves instead of seeking another superintendency” (Hall & Difford, 1992, p. 9).

Exiting occurs when an individual leaves a superintendency, either voluntarily or involuntarily (non-renewal of contracts, resignations), and moves into some other working role, either in or out of education (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993).

Point of Exit refers to the reason(s) prompting a woman to leave the position as superintendent before the expiration of her contract and/or the reason(s) prompting her not to seek another superintendency.

Premature Exit denotes early departure of a woman from her position as superintendent or her superintendent’s career.

Public School Superintendent is the top-level school official within a public school system, usually selected by members of a school board.

Pulls are challenges and opportunities in alternate locations that encourage voluntary departures (Czaja & Harman, 1999; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993).

Pushes are factors within a school system that contribute to involuntary departures (Czaja & Harman, 1999; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993).
Tenure is the length of time a position is held.

Turnover is moving from district to district as a superintendent (Hall & Difford, 1992).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of six chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction and background of the study, the research problem and the purpose of the study, significance of the study, a brief methodological research overview, delimitations of the study, definition of terms, and the organization of the dissertation. In Chapter 2, the researcher reviews relevant literature on the African American woman in leadership, education, and the superintendency; challenges and barriers for the African American woman’s ascent to the superintendency, and factors that contributed to African American women exiting the superintendency. The research methodology is described in Chapter 3, including the design, sample population, data-collection, and thematic analysis.

Chapter 4 focuses on the former African American women superintendents’ stories and factors common to their exits from the superintendency. In Chapter 5, the researcher identifies and analyzes salient themes emergent from the personal interviews and questions related to the exiting factors of African American women superintendents. In the final chapter, the author provides a summary of the study, presents salient conclusions from the research, offers recommendations to incumbents and aspirants to the position as proposed by the former superintendents, and recommends leadership actions and topics for further study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The history of African Americans is central to an understanding of the American past. Yet, for years, White historians denied, by mere omission, the existence of a realistic African American past. In spite of this purposeful negligence, a historical body of research exists today that presents a partial picture of the lived experiences of African Americans inclusive of their struggles to become educated. However, scholars including Collier-Thomas (1982), Doughty (1977), Hine and Thompson (1997, 1998), Johnson, (2000), and Lerner (1973) noted the dearth of literature addressing the history of African American women in America, specifically in education, and especially before the early 1800s. African American women, suggested Lerner (1973):

have been doubly victimized by scholarly neglect and racist assumptions. Belonging as they do to two groups which have traditionally been treated as inferiors by American society—Blacks and women—they have been doubly invisible. Their records lay buried, unread, infrequently noticed and even more seldom interpreted. (p. xviii)

Therefore, studying African American women and their leadership in education necessitates an understanding of the inimitable issues they have faced. Perhaps these issues are the ones to which Mary McLeod Bethune referred in a 1933 speech delivered at the Chicago Women’s Federation Conference when she stated:

One hundred years ago she was the most pathetic figure on the American continent. She was not a person, in the opinion of many, but a thing—a thing whose personality had no claim to the respect of mankind. She was a household drudge, a means for getting distasteful work done. She was an animated agricultural implement to augment the service of males and plows in cultivating and harvesting the cotton crop. Then she was an automatic incubator, a producer of human livestock, beneath whose heart and lungs more power potential laborers could be bred and nurtured and brought to the light of day. (p. 35)
The Early Years: 1619–1865

The bowels of slavery manifested a subservient role, a role heaped upon the vast majority of African American women between 1619 and 1865. Amott and Matthaei (1996) suggested that several reasons contributed to this role: (1) Virginia’s official recognition of slavery in 1661; (2) the development of a “racial caste system” in the colonies wherein “Black indentured slaves were forced into lifetime servitude as slaves” (p. 143); (3) the passage of a 1662 Virginia law dictating that the “child of an enslaved Black woman was a slave regardless of the status of the father” (p. 143); and (4) the employment of White women for agricultural work, for which slave masters incurred heavy taxation, whereas the use of Black women was free (p. 143).

In early colonial America, these three types of settlements existed: French, Spanish, and English. Thus, provisions for so-called enlightening the minds of the enslaved African Americans varied from colony to colony. Educational opportunities were nonexistent, severely limited, or openly provided (Woodson, 1968). Woodson (1968) suggested the following three reasons that African Americans, more often men than women, received a rudimentary education during the 1600s and 1700s: (1) Educated slaves were economically advantageous to slave owners; (2) White sympathizers reached out to the downtrodden; and (3) in their effort to convert slaves to Christianity, the various religious missionaries believed it was necessary that slaves learn the English language (p. 2). At best, efforts to educate African Americans were disconnected and unorganized.

On the one hand, a formal education and/or apprenticeship were the exception rather than the rule for the vast majority of enslaved African Americans. On the other
hand, free African Americans who had ventured to northeastern cities such as Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York provided for their education and that of their children because they were wealthy enough to establish their own schools or could afford to send their children to private academies.

Also, during the 1700s, White philanthropists established a few institutions for the education of African Americans (Berry & Blassingame, 1982). Under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which was organized in London in 1701 to do missionary work among Indians and Blacks in colonial America, Reverend Samuel Thomas in South Carolina and Elias Neau in New York City established schools for educating African Americans in the early 1700s (Woodson, 1968). Neau’s school reportedly enrolled male and female, free and slave students. Another SPG school founded in 1743 in Charleston, South Carolina, had as its teachers two slaves whom the SPG had purchased and trained in Christian principles and educational fundamentals. In spite of South Carolina’s 1740 law forbidding the teaching of slaves, the school existed until 1764 (Woodson, 1968). Three decades later, in 1794, Catherine Ferguson, a former slave, established in her home the first Sunday School in New York, the Catherine Ferguson School for the Poor, where for 40 years she taught and supervised integrated groups of students (Hine & Thompson, 1997). Religious groups, such as the Quakers in Philadelphia and New Jersey and the Puritans in New England, operated schools for African Americans. The teachers’ assistants in these schools were often African American women who later became teachers and established their own schools (Estell, 1994; Hine & Thompson, 1997).
Serving as reinforcement to chattel slavery and slave codes, restrictive legislation sanctioned ignorance with its prohibition of teaching African American slaves to read and write. As early as 1740, South Carolina officials made it illegal to educate enslaved African Americans, thus, predating by more than 75 years similar restrictive legislation in other slave states. Missouri’s 1817 law regulated the assembly and travel of African American slaves; Virginia’s 1819 law prevented the assembly of free or enslaved African Americans for the teaching of reading or writing; Mississippi’s 1823 law prohibited the assembly of five or more Blacks for the educational purpose of learning to read and write (Woodson, 1968). In 1850, Indiana’s failure to include African Americans in the school tax contributed to their being expelled from education in that state, while Delaware’s leaders declared free education only for White children over the age of five (Funke, 1920).

However, clandestine schools were operated in the slave states (Lerner, 1973), if only briefly and from time to time. In such schools, some slaves learned the most elementary reading and writing skills while other slaves were self-taught. Nevertheless, in their zeal to become literate, slaves often faced great danger. Freedman (1999) noted that, “Despite the threats and vicious penalties for learning to read, and the harsher penalties for teaching, enslaved African Americans struggled to form schools” (p. 6).

With the establishment of their schools and/or classes in the early 1800s, several African American women or societies of women contributed to the formal education of African Americans. A historical chronology revealed these facts:

- Julian Frounountaine opened a free school for African Americans in Savannah, Georgia (Hine & Thompson, 1997).
Ann Maria Becraft, at age 15, was credited with the founding of a boarding school for Black girls in Washington, DC, a school she ran for 8 years (Hine & Thompson, 1997; Lerner, 1973; Woodson, 1968).

Elizabeth Lange opened a school for French-speaking Black immigrants in Baltimore. Pope Gregory XVI complimented her accomplishments by allowing her to found a religious order, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, dedicated to education (Hine & Thompson, 1997).

The Colored Woman’s Society established the St. Frances Academy, the first such academy for colored girls (Funke, 1920), which offered courses above the primary level (Perkins, 1980).

Although free African Americans existed in the 1600s and 1700s, the number of freedmen and freedwomen proliferated in the late 1700s and the early 1800s (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Hine & Thompson, 1998; Woodson, 1968). Amott and Matthaei (1996) suggested these several reasons for the increase:

1. Some were descended from ancestors who had never been enslaved;
2. Others had been given their freedom by the state, by their former masters, or by other African Americans who had purchased and then freed them; and
3. Others had purchased their own freedom or had escaped to freedom (p. 149).

Freedom from slavery did not allow African Americans the same rights as Whites. Special laws for free African Americans governed every aspect of their lives (e.g., enforcement of strict segregation in housing and in labor, restriction on travel, trials for African Americans in slave courts, and the payment of special taxes; Amott & Matthaei, 1996, p. 149).
In the book, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*, Hine and Thompson (1998) suggested the following four themes running through the history of African American women: community, education, truth, and triumph. In *Hine Sight*, Hine (1994) asserted that “making community means the processes of creating religious, educational, health-care, philanthropic, political, and familial institutions and professional organizations that enable our children to survive” (p. xxii). Making community also placed a high value on becoming literate. As Collier-Thomas (1982) stated, “Education has persisted as one of the most consistent themes in the life, thought, struggle and protest of black Americans. It has been viewed a major avenue for acquiring first class citizenship” (p. 173).

Additionally, Perkins (1980) identified the philosophy of race *uplift* or *elevation* (p. 3), which African Americans espoused and which permeated the various making community (Hine, 1994, p. xxii) activities. “The central theme,” Perkins (1980) stated, “of the ‘uplift’ philosophy was duty and obligation to the race” (p. 3). Perkins further pointed out the significance of the African American woman to this philosophy of making community (Hine, 1994, p. xxii), which afforded her myriad opportunities to step into various leadership roles.

Beginning in the late 1700s, throughout the 1800s, and continuing into the 1900s, several dominant issues dictated the formation of African American women’s organizations and clubs. One such issue was economic assistance. Mutual aid and benevolent societies with membership consisting of both men and women (e.g., the 1790s Friendly Society of St. Thomas, Philadelphia, and the 1790s African Society of Boston) were established to “promote the welfare of the colored community . . . to assist members
in distress . . . and to care for widows and orphans” (Perkins, 1980, p. 5). Resources collected through membership dues allowed financial assistance to be given to members in case of sickness and/or death (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). Dues ranged from 12 ½ cents monthly to $1 quarterly in some Philadelphia mutual aid societies (Perkins, 1980). Increasingly, many organizations became exclusively female (e.g., the 1809 African Female Benevolent Society of Newport, Rhode Island, and the 1818 Colored Female Religious Moral Society of Salem, Massachusetts).

In addition to providing economic assistance, the abolition of slavery and the political and social equality of free African Americans became central goals and dominant issues of these antebellum-era organizations. These organizations provided a stage for the political and social justice activism of free African American women. In fact, Sumier-Lewis (1981) suggested:

. . . many black women activists made a profound impact upon the struggles for liberty and for social justice in America. As black females in a racist-sexist society, they brought a unique perspective to their work. Because of a sharpened awareness and because of daily expressions in a biased America, black women activists guided female reform groups toward a more straightforward liberal posture. (p. 281)

At times, abolitionists crossed gender, racial, and class lines with anti-slavery societies being led by Black and White men as well as Black and White women. However, several authors (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Berry & Blassingame, 1982; Giddings, 1984; Hine & Thompson, 1997; Perkins, 1980; Yee, 1998) noted that these organizations often reflected the era’s conventional social and racial structure. While African American women were involved in the two integrated abolitionist groups, (i.e., the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society), they often contended with the racism of White women abolitionists who refused
to admit them to other anti-slavery organizations. The contention was that having African American women as members of such organizations suggested that all women were equal.

Although African American women did not ignore such conflict, they “made community” (Hine, 1994, p. xxii) and concentrated on the issues-at-hand by organizing their own anti-slavery societies, which raised money to support newspapers, sponsor lecturers, and hold exhibitions for the movement. From the wealthy and formally educated to the poor and illiterate, these African American women activists varied in their abolitionist’s venues and in their leadership roles. For example:

- Mary Shadd Cary: In addition to becoming the first African American female editor who founded her own newspaper in order not to have her abolitionist views censored, she became the second African American woman in the United States to earn a law degree (Hine & Thompson, 1997).
- Ellen Watkins Harper: Although she took up the abolition cause by publicly lecturing against slavery following the death of a free Black man due to the Fugitive Slave Law, she also lectured on the uplift of her race and was an Underground Railroad agent (Perkins, 1980).
- Sarah Parker Redmond: Born to a prominent Massachusetts free African American family, Sarah, at the age of 16, began her anti-slavery lectures as she traveled with her brother, also a noted abolitionist lecturer. As an American Anti-Slavery Society lecturer, she toured England, Scotland, and Ireland. Following the Civil War, she continued her lectures, changing her topic to the uplift of her race (Hine & Thompson, 1998; Perkins, 1980).
- **Sojourner Truth:** Born into slavery, freed with the abolition of slavery in New York, the former Isabella Van Wagenen became an itinerant Pentecostal preacher and received through “divine spirit” both the names Sojourner and Truth. A tall, imposing woman with a powerful singing voice, the illiterate but intelligent and witty Sojourner became a forceful lecturer in both the anti-slavery and suffrage (African American men) movements as well as a Union spy. As an uninvited participant at the 1851 White Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, she delivered her famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech (Hine & Thompson, 1998; Sally, 1993).

- **Harriet Tubman:** An escaped slave herself, the former Araminta Ross became the “Moses” of her people and the most efficacious conductor of the Underground Railroad as she completed 19 trips to help 300 slaves make their way to freedom. Along with other African American women during the Civil War, she also became a Union spy, a nurse, a lecturer, and a fundraiser (Brawley, 1945; Hine & Thompson, 1998; Sally, 1993).

**Higher Education for African American Women**

As antebellum free African American women struggled for the abolition of slavery and for their own equality, the theme and philosophy of education, race uplift, remained the motto within the community (Perkins, 1983). Higher education provided another avenue through which they could continue to “make community” and have a positive impact on the social, political, and economic conditions of their people. The existing higher education institutions during the early 1800s were open for admission only to Whites, mainly White men. However, according to public records, John B.
Russworm, who graduated from Bowdoin College, was the first African American man to receive a college degree (Woodson, 1968). As Amott and Matthaei (1996) pointed out, “Denying African Americans access to education, and then arguing that their illiteracy proved their inferiority, was a tool in whites’ subordination of Blacks; proving whites wrong in theory and practice was a main concern of the free Black community” (p. 155).

Before the Civil War and outside of the South, leaders of a few communities were successful in their attempt to establish higher education for African Americans. Providing one such rare opportunity was Oberlin College. While faculty members at Oberlin College, founded in 1833 in Ohio, encouraged and admitted White females and African American females and males to the higher education program in 1835 (Lawson & Merrill, 1983; Woodson, 1968), “almost all colleges and female seminaries refused to admit African American women” (Amott & Matthaei, 1996, p. 154). An on-campus preparatory school was provided at Oberlin for those students who needed academic assistance before entering the college-level courses. Lawson and Merrill (1983) noted that some African American students completed the prescribed preparatory curriculum but did not enter Oberlin’s college program. In addition to its preparatory school program, Oberlin’s faculty members offered a theology program and a four-year Ladies Course, a program that did not require women to take Latin, Greek, or higher mathematics (Lawson & Merrill, 1983). In 1850, Lucy Stanton became the first African American woman to graduate from Oberlin’s four-year Ladies Course (Lawson & Merrill, 1983).

In their study of Oberlin College’s student population, Lawson and Merrill (1983) found that at least 100 African Americans had attended Oberlin before the Civil War. Of
those, 32 had graduated between 1844 and 1865. Of the 32, 16 were women who had completed the Ladies Course while 5 had graduated from Oberlin’s degree program (pp. 151–152). These findings also surfaced:

1. Free families often relocated from slave states to Ohio in order that a son or daughter could enroll at Oberlin. One such family was the Woodsons, whose daughter, Sarah Jane, became one of the first Black women in 1852 to enroll in Oberlin;

2. The scarcity of “respectable professions” for African American women other than as domestic servant prompted parents, especially mothers, to encourage and financially support their daughter(s)’ enrollment in Oberlin’s higher education program; and

3. Mary J. Patterson, in 1862, became the first African American woman to graduate from Oberlin’s degree program. Her educational career included teaching in Philadelphia for 7 years. In 1871 she became the first African American woman principal of the Preparatory High School for Negroes in Washington, DC (Scott, 1979).

Daniel (1949), Scott (1979), Woodson (1968), and Wormley (1920) credited Myrtilla Miner, a young New York White woman of frail health, for her fierce determination and her gigantic efforts, against all odds (e.g., insufficient funds, threats of violence, physical attacks), with the establishment of a private institution of higher education for African American women. With the help of friends, in 1851 Miner opened the Colored Girls’ School in Washington, DC, as a teacher preparatory school and the first such institution of its kind. Miner died in 1864, before the complete realization of
her dream, but not before her school was incorporated as the Institution for the Education of Colored Youth in 1863. Miner’s illness and subsequent death contributed to the inactivity of her school from 1863–1871 before it became part of Howard University (Daniel, 1949, p. 44). The school operated as part of Howard University’s Normal Department from 1871–1877 and was named the Miner Normal School. Two years later it became affiliated with the District of Columbia’s school system, where two African American women served as principals (i.e., Martha Briggs, 1879–1883, and Lucy Moten, 1883–1920) and continued the preparation of African American women for the teaching profession (Hine & Thompson, 1998).

The establishment of other pre-Civil War institutions of higher education for African Americans, such as the Institute for Colored Youth in 1852, Wilberforce University in 1854, and Lincoln University in 1854 (Woodson, 1968) was facilitated through the financial contributions and efforts of philanthropic individuals as well as religious denominations (e.g., Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians). Additionally, Woodson (1968) noted that by 1852 African Americans had been permitted entry into a few liberal White higher education institutions (e.g., Bowdoin College, Rutland College, Harvard University Medical School, and Dartmouth Theological School; p. 277).

Between 1865 and 1900, mostly in the South, various philanthropic individuals and groups, federal government officials, and members of Black as well as White religious denominational groups worked to establish institutions of higher education for African Americans. These assorted groups included the American Missionary Association; the American Baptist Home Mission Society; the Freedmen’s Bureau; and Presbyterian, Baptist, African Methodist, and Episcopalian churches. Members of
Congress passed the First and Second Morrill Acts that established a number of Black and White land-grant colleges. Perkins (1980) noted that this “growing number of Black colleges . . . Even though they were called colleges, in reality they were mostly more like high schools” (p. 4). While most were co-educational, a few colleges began as preparatory schools for African American women, such as Scotia College (1867), Concord, North Carolina; and the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary (1881), Atlanta, Georgia, the nation’s oldest African American women’s undergraduate liberal arts college. Because of John D. Rockefeller’s financial support, the name of this Seminary was later changed to Spelman College, Spelman being his wife’s maiden name.

Originally founded as co-educational, Bennett College (1873), Greensboro, North Carolina, was reorganized in 1926 as a women’s college.

Although they were few in number, African American women also sought opportunities for higher education at the Seven Sister Colleges (i.e., Mount Holyoke Seminary, 1837; Vassar, 1865; Smith, 1875; Wellesley, 1875; Radcliffe, 1879; Bryn Mawr, 1884; and Barnard, 1889). In her study of African American women at the Seven Sister Colleges, Perkins (1997) noted the admission and graduation of at least 500 African American women from 1880–1960. Known for their academic excellence, these colleges educated the daughters of the “. . . most wealthy and prominent White citizens of the nation” (p. 719). Even though the African American women also hailed from prominent families and represented “the daughters of elite Black America” (p. 721), college personnel in some subtle and open ways retained society’s discriminatory policies against these women in admission, financial aid, and housing (p. 718). Yet Perkins (1997) found that the women remained steadfast in their pursuit of the education offered
and went on to “serve on faculties of African American high schools and colleges, and became prominent lawyers, physicians, and scientists” (p. 722).

Selected Post-Bellum African American Women Administrators

Historically, African American women and White women have been teachers, elementary principals, and school founders. However, while a number of White women were being elected to county superintendencies in the 19th century (Blount, 1998), the highest administrative position held by an African American woman was that of principal (Revere, 1985; Scott, 1980). In fact, Blount’s (1998) study revealed that in the late 1800s White women held “228 county superintendencies, two state superintendencies, and 12 city superintendencies” (pp. 70–71), with an increase to 495 county superintendencies within 5 years (p. 71).

For the African American woman, her pioneering 19th century administrative position came with the appointment of Fannie Jackson to the principalship in 1869 at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. Established through the benevolence of a wealthy Quaker, the Institute offered elementary and high school instruction to African American youth (Perkins, 1982). Recruited to a teaching position in 1865 before completing her final year at Oberlin College, Jackson became the “first African American woman to lead an institution of higher learning in the nation” (Perkins, 1982, p. 183). While teaching in the Female Department of the Institute, Jackson was assisted by Mary Jane Patterson, Oberlin College’s first African American woman graduate. Patterson left the Institute in 1869 to accept a teaching position at the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth in Washington, DC, where she later became the school’s first African
American woman principal, appointed first to serve from 1871–1872 and, with her second appointment, from 1873–1884 (Terrell, 1917).

Armed with Bachelor of Arts and Master’s degrees from Oberlin College, Anna Julia Cooper taught French, German, and literature at Wilberforce University and geometry, Latin, and Greek at the Saint Augustine Normal and Collegiate Institute. Thus, she was considered an experienced instructor when she joined the teaching faculty in 1887 at the M Street High School, formerly the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth, in Washington, DC. As a teacher and an assistant principal, Cooper spent 15 years at the M Street High School before being appointed as the principal in 1902.

Although the school grew in prominence and its students achieved high academic excellence, Cooper was brought up on numerous charges when she refused to change the school’s curriculum from classical and college preparatory to vocational. Although unable to prove the charges, Board members voted to dismiss Cooper from her position in 1906. Cooper assumed a teaching position at Lincoln University and even returned to the M Street High School when the district’s new superintendent recruited her.

Her love of learning propelled her to pursue her doctoral studies at Columbia University; however, family problems prevented Cooper’s completion of the one-year residency at Columbia. With the help of a friend, Cooper was able to transfer her credits to the University of Paris, Sorbonne, where she later completed her dissertation and received her doctorate at age 66 (Johnson, 2000).

Cooper became the second president of Frelinghuysen University in Washington, DC, in 1930. Created by Jesse Lawson, the institution offered courses to employed African American adults who desired the formal education denied to them during their
youth. Cooper retired in 1941 and, in spite of the efforts of many educators, including the continued contributions of Cooper, the University closed in 1964. Cooper’s educational experiences “encompassed [the period from] the reconstruction to the Brown v. Board of Education 1954 decision” (Johnson, 2000, p. 89). Until her death at the age of 105, Cooper continued to make valuable contributions to the education of African American women and men.

Other examples of known African American women who served as public school administrators during the late 1800s and the early 1900s include Mary Morris Burnett, a graduate of Oberlin College, who served as principal of Union High School, Little Rock, Arkansas, from 1887–1891, until her marriage, which, according to custom at that time, dictated her resignation (Williams, 1983); and Olivia Davidson (Washington), Margaret Murray (Washington), and Hallie Quinn Brown, who, in addition to their teaching, fundraising capabilities, and community outreach involvement, became principals at Tuskegee Institute, serving under Booker T. Washington (Littlefield, 1997).

**Selected Post-Bellum African American Women School Founders**

“Seeking to improve the status, material conditions and image of the race and gender . . . Promoting moral living, self-sufficiency, and female achievement” (McCluskey, 1997, p. 404), other African American women founded their own schools during the late 1800s and early 1900s. In 1886, 15 years prior to the founding of schools by three other African American women, Lucy Laney opened the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augustus, Georgia, where she “emphasized character building and academic competence” (McCluskey, 1997, p. 407) and expressed her belief “in women’s special role as moral leaders of communities, in their self-sufficiency and in their service
orientation” (p. 408). Begun as a girls’ school, the Institute became co-educational and remained open until 1949.

Stressing “Washington’s brand of industrialism (improved methods of agriculture)” (McCluskey, 1997, p. 414), Charlotte Hawkins’ Palmer Memorial Institute opened in rural Sedalia, North Carolina, in 1901. In 1937, Hawkins changed the school’s curriculum to her original philosophy of providing a college preparatory boarding school for a select group of Black boys and girls, using “the Palmer triangle of achievement” (religion, culture, and educational excellence; McCluskey, 1997, p. 414). From the elementary school she opened at age 19, Brown transformed her school into one of the “foremost finishing schools in the country” (Hine & Thompson, 1997, p. 22).

As a teacher at the Haines Institute, Mary McLeod Bethune later sought to open her own school for girls “which stressed the utilization of the ‘head, heart, and hand’” (McCluskey, 1997, p. 410). The Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in Daytona Beach, Florida, which Bethune opened in 1904 with a domestic/science vocational curriculum, was “her attempt to elevate the status of black females by raising their drudge work to the level of skilled artisans” (McCluskey, 1997, p. 411). Merging with Jacksonville’s Cookman Institute for Boys in 1923, the school became the Bethune-Cookman Collegiate Institute, now the Bethune–Cookman College (McCluskey, 1997).

“We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible” (Lerner, 1973, p. 132) was Nannie Burroughs’ motto for the National Training School for Women and Girls, which she opened in 1909 in Washington, DC. McCluskey (1997) noted that the “school was the first all-female school of national scope operated by a black woman to open outside the
Deep South” (p. 419). The school was granted junior college status because of the ever-expanding curriculum, and the name was changed to the National Trades and Professional School for Women and Girls in 1929 (McCluskey, 1997, p. 420).

Educationally, socially, economically, and politically, each woman discussed in this historical overview made a significant contribution to the uplift of her race. These women “spent their entire adult lives struggling to eradicate” (Johnson, 2000, p. xii) the barriers imposed by “race, class, and gender oppression” (Johnson, 2000, p. xii) through their chosen venues. With the same spirit, passion, persistence, and determination to overcome these oppressions personally, they founded schools, colleges, as well as community organizations and raised their voices to help the members of their African American communities achieve the “wholly impossible.”

The Jeanes Supervisors

Conditions for educating the host of African American children, especially in the rural South, were deplorable in the early 1900s (Berry & Blassingame, 1982; Funke, 1920; Hine & Thompson, 1998; Jones, 1937). However, when the financial resources of Anna T. Jeanes, the strengths of African American women teachers, the human and financial resources of southern African American communities, and the positive attitudes of some southern White male educational leaders merged, another leadership venue for African American women educators was established. These forces came together with the goal of improving educational conditions and opportunities for rural African American children. Leading this movement was a cadre of African American women known by various names, including Traveling Teachers, the Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teachers, the Jeanes Teachers, and the Jeanes Supervisors (Hollie, 2000; Jones, 1937; Williams et
The Jeanes Supervisors, who existed for more than 60 years, were actually the predecessors of African American women in the upper echelons of school leadership. The Jeanes Supervisors were, in fact, provided by Anna Thomas Jeanes, a previous donor to Hampton Institute and a wealthy Quaker heiress, who was concerned about the conditions under which African American children were being educated, particularly in southern African American rural schools (Jones, 1937). In 1908, Jeanes propelled a movement when she established the Fund for Rudimentary Schools for Southern Negroes with one of her final bequests of $1 million (Williams et al., 1979).

The paths of Jackson Davis, proponent of Hampton Institute’s extension method of school improvement that sent Hampton teachers to help small, rural schools (Jones, 1937, p. 14), and of Virginia Estelle Randolph of Henrico County, Virginia, merged to promote further the Jeanes Teacher movement (later so named). As superintendent of the Henrico County Schools, Davis’ job took him to both African American and White schools and to the Hampton Institute, where he became “impressed with the unique techniques for upgrading rural schools” (Williams et al., 1979, p. 23). Davis met Virginia Randolph at the Mountain Road School where she had been placed as a teacher at age 16 and remained for 12 years. According to Hollie (2000), upon Davis’ visit in 1905:

he found a school which flourished in spite of inadequate funding, insufficient supplies and a teacher with limited formal education . . . . Virginia Randolph had developed an educational facility which effectively utilized the industrial education model which was supported by the students, their parents, and the broader Mountain Road community. (pp. 44, 46)

Securing finances through the Jeanes Fund, Davis hired Virginia Randolph in 1908 as the first Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teacher in Henrico County, Virginia (Jones, 1937;
Williams et al., 1979). Her primary responsibilities were “to assist and direct county teachers in their efforts to improve their local communities” (Hollie, 2000, p. 54).

According to Jones (1937), the Jeanes’ Board of Trustees had experimented with a similar program in Louisiana. Extension Teachers, trained in industrial subjects (e.g., woodwork and sewing), taught these subjects at various assigned schools. Initially, the Jeanes’ Board of Trustees employed and paid only one African American woman in Iberville Parish, Louisiana, as an Extension Teacher (Jones, 1937, p. 40); but the success of the program required the employment of many additional teachers in other southern states.

With the completion of her first session, Virginia Rudolph, the first Jeanes Teacher, sent to her superintendent, Jackson Davis, and the Jeanes’ Board of Trustees, a simple but explicitly detailed daily work report. Not only did this report provide a full overview of what her job entailed, but it also allowed a comparison to be made between her program and the program of the Extension Teachers. Within 2 years, following an evaluation of both programs by James Dillard, chair of the Jeanes’ Board of Trustees, the Extension Teachers became the Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teachers (Jones, 1937).

Who were these Jeanes Supervisors? During the 1913–1914 school session, Botsch (n.d., para. 12) noted that of the 118 Jeanes Supervisors, 29 men and 89 women were employed in 19 southern counties (p. 47); by the 1933–1934 school session, 303 Jeanes Supervisors were employed, with 17 men and 286 women involved. Dawson’s (2001) research revealed that the majority of the Jeanes Supervisors were married women between the ages of 35–55 (p. 286). Additionally, these women were described as dedicated humanitarians; creative, flexible, resourceful, and innovative community
activists/representatives; and women affiliated with churches and multiple women’s organizations. Furthermore, she concluded from her study that “most supervisors were compassionate, empathetic women who respected and were genuinely concerned about the welfare and well-being of other people” (Dawson, 2001, p. 287). Prior to assuming this position, most Jeanes Supervisors had experience as teachers trained at private colleges or at state normal schools (Dawson, 2001; Jones, 1937). In terms of curriculum, the early Jeanes Supervisors were trained in academic education, or industrial/vocational education, at least to a high school level. A few received elementary education preparation and at least one course in rural supervisory education (Jones, 1937).

According to Dawson (2001), by the 1940s–1950s, a college-level education was required. By the 1960s, some supervisors had completed post-graduate-level courses (Dawson, 2001).

From her research, Dawson (2001) concluded that the duties and responsibilities of the Jeanes Supervisors involved work in these three areas: “multi-community responsibilities, multi-school responsibilities, and administrative responsibilities” (p. 289). Some of the administrative duties, which changed over the course of time, included the following:

- creating and forwarding reports to county school superintendents and state agents for Negro education;
- evaluating the condition of school facilities and academic procedures being conducted at the rural schools;
- evaluating the work of regular classroom teachers;
• recommending appropriate applicants for teaching positions and
  recommendations for dismissals; and
• reporting statistical data on students and community residents and data on past
  and future school and community events. (p. 290)

Additionally, Williams et al. (1979) noted the leadership roles of the supervisors as
resource persons for physical plant surveys and for program/curriculum development
efforts.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the 1964
Civil Rights Act closed old doors and opened new ones. As Williams et al. (1979) stated,
“Without a doubt the greatest impact and loss in the desegregation struggle have been
with the black administrators and teachers” (p. 90). This loss came with the closing of
African American schools and the placement of African American administrators as well
as teachers into integrated school systems. Generally, desegregating the school systems
meant assigning African American teachers to White schools. For African American
principals, this situation sometimes meant being demoted to assistant principals and
placed in White schools or being assigned to newly created positions (e.g., administrative
aide, director of federal and special programs, administrative assistant, and instructional
assistant; Williams et al., 1979, p. 90). With the new experience of school integration,
having the Jeanes Supervisors watching over White teachers was considered
unacceptable. Botsch (n.d.) noted that with the input of federal monies into the funding of
new programs to assist teachers, the Jeanes Supervisory program was seen as redundant
(para. 24). Spanning a 60-year period, the Jeanes Supervisor movement unfortunately
came to a close during the late 1960s (Williams et al., 1979; Botsch, n.d.).
African American Women Superintendents

Collier-Thomas (1982), Estell (1994), Freedman (1999), Funke (1920), Hansot and Tyack (1981), Hine and Thompson (1997, 1998), Johnson (2000), Jones (1937), Jones and Montenegro (1985), Lerner (1973), McCluskey (1997), Perkins (1980, 1987), and Woodson (1968) have firmly established the existence of African American women as teachers, principals, and school founders. With their research, Doughty (1977) and Marable (1974) confirmed that African American women served in administrative positions other than the principalship (e.g., Assistant Principal, Assistant Superintendent, and Supervisory Positions). With the central purpose of describing the “career patterns and successes of black women as chief administrators of public school districts” (p. 4), Revere (1985) documented the existence of the first African American woman superintendent, Velma Dolphin Ashley. Appointed by a school board of three members, Ashley assumed her superintendency of the all African American Boley, Oklahoma, school district in 1944 where she remained until 1956. Succeeded by her husband, Lilliard Ashley, she served as his Administrative Assistant during his 20-year tenure (p. 69).

Approximately 14 years passed before other African American women were appointed to superintendencies. Arnez (1982) identified these African American women superintendents in the 1970s: Edith Gaines, Hartford, Connecticut; Margaret Labat, Evanston, Illinois; and Barbara Sizemore, Washington, DC. A decade later, in 1982, Arnez verified that 11 African American women held the superintendent’s position. As illustrated in Table 2, the number of African American women in the superintendency has increased since 1944; yet researchers have confirmed that the position remains dominated
by White males (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Grogan & Brunner, 2007). Additionally, in comparison to the total number of women superintendents, African American women remain dramatically underrepresented in the superintendency. (See Table 2.)

Table 2

Number of African American Women Superintendents Compared to Women Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Districts</th>
<th>No. of Black Women Supts.</th>
<th>No. of Women Supts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>13,728</td>
<td>62 (Barrens–Alexander)</td>
<td>1,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>33 (Jackson)</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>45 (Alston)</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>32 (Jackson)</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>10,683</td>
<td>19 (Bell and Chase)</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>11,007</td>
<td>14 (Bell and Chase)</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>16,000</td>
<td>29 (Revere)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>13,715</td>
<td>11 (Arnez)</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>10,380</td>
<td>3 (Arnez)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1 (Revere)</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In her report on ethnic minority superintendents contained within the 2000 AASA study on superintendents, Brunner acknowledged limitations in being able to disaggregate data by race, “because all races and ethnicities categorized as minority are grouped together in the study reducing individual and particular racial group identity” (p. 103). In a mid-decade national study of the American superintendency sanctioned by the AASA, Glass and Franceschini (2007) noted that “No data exists [sic] that identifies [sic]
the race of superintendents by districts” (p. 17). Moreover, data on gender were limited to the categories of male and female. However, specific to women in the superintendency and in central office positions, the purpose of a 2003 study conducted by Grogan and Brunner (2007) and endorsed by the AASA was to produce the “most comprehensive up-to-date, comprehensive information” (p. 46) on this targeted population in school administration.

The research assisted in “creating a sharper, more vivid image of women in senior educational leadership” (Grogan & Brunner, 2007, p. 109); however, the 50 African American women superintendent respondents were subsumed under the umbrella of women-of-color. Structuring a profile of the African American woman superintendent required use of the distinct information pulled from the 2003 study as well as unpublished doctoral dissertations and all other research reports focused specifically on this group. The following profile resulted from a comprehensive review of documentation available about the African American woman superintendent.

Profile

As a group, African American women superintendents tended to exhibit these common characteristics:

- were between 45 and 60 years of age
- had children
- were reared in a working-class, two-parent family
- had worked as teachers for 4 to 15 years before assuming an administrative position
had served more often than men superintendents as director/coordinator and assistant superintendent

had held elementary and middle school assistant principalships and secondary principalships

were place bound, although not always by choice but by availability of the superintendency

held more superintendencies in urban districts than suburban or rural school districts

held the highest degree in their field (i.e., the doctorate; Alston, 1996; Barrens-Alexander, 2000; Collins, 2002; Grogan & Brunner, 2007; Hosier, 2002; Jackson, 1999; Revere, 1985; Sanders-Lawson, 2001).

In addition, in terms of personal characteristics, researchers confirmed that African American women superintendents exhibited competence, a high level of self-esteem, a high work ethic, strength and a strong-willed nature, dedication, supportive family units, an in-depth understanding of self, association with powerful community models while growing up, resiliency, the ability to persevere and excel, and spirituality or belief in a higher power (Alston, 1996; Barrens-Alexander, 2000; Collins, 2002; Hosier, 2002; Jackson, 1999; Revere, 1985; Sanders-Lawson, 2001). Also, being actively involved in both professional and community service organizations tended to be of importance to these women superintendents (Jackson, 1999; Revere, 1985).

“Messiahs, Scapegoats, and Sacrificial Lambs”

According to Hill and Ragland (1995), being “messiahs, scapegoats, and sacrificial lambs” was a factor that “create[d] an environment conducive to women’s
obtaining administrative positions” (p. 17) and facilitated the placement of women, especially minority women, into the higher ranks of educational administration. Other scholars, including Arnez (1986), Bell (1988), Bjork and Rodgers (1999), Edson, (1987), Scott (1980), Townsel and Banks (1975), and Yeakey, Johnston, and Adkison (1986) concurred that the “messiah, scapegoat, or sacrificial lamb” factor specifically contributed to the availability of positions in the superintendency for African American women and men as well as other minorities.

These extra-challenging superintendent positions, previously held by White males, were usually in large urban school districts. One of the respondents in Edson’s study (1987) stated that “they [women] usually got their jobs because of a crisis or because the particular school was at its lowest ebb. Women don’t get the plums, they get the challenges” (p. 275). As Arnez (1986) asserted, “Even a cursory observation can lead one to the conclusion that when the big city school systems went bankrupt and when they became overwhelmingly Black, Black men and women were recruited” (p. 398) and became the messiahs, the scapegoats, or the sacrificial lambs. In fact, Scott (1980) predicted:

Black superintendents will inherit the effects of societal deterioration, unabated decline in academic achievement, deficient financial resources, higher percentages of black students and students from low income families, a black majority or activist blacks on the school board, large numbers of blacks in the community, and demands from vocal blacks in the community. (p. 188)

In their study, Hill and Ragland (1995) indicated that women who accepted their first administrative positions were usually warned of having to go in and “clean up a mess of some type” (p. 21). Furthermore, some women became sacrificial lambs, for in their achievement and having successfully accomplished their missions, they lost their
positions. Bjork and Rodgers (1999) suggested that school board members who recruited minority superintendents often “set unrealistic goals and expected them to have immaculate perception and find miraculous solutions to intractable problems” (p. 6).

Facing greater demands and difficult situations, Townsel and Banks (1975) asserted that Blacks “must be able to ‘walk on water’” (p. 421). Ten years later, Revere (1985) concluded that African American women were “recruited for the left over districts and for failure” (pp. 160–161) and were “expected to become miracle workers and turn despair into joy” (p. 160).

Challenges

Barriers to women’s ascent to the superintendency and/or educational administration can be collapsed into these two categories: internal and external obstacles. Generally, internal barriers are those related to a woman’s attitudes and values as well as aspects of her personality, roles, and self-perception. These barriers are ones a woman herself can address and change (Shakeshaft, 1989). External barriers, typically associated with society or institutions, are considered environmental circumstances. As Criswell and Betz (1995) explained, “These are barriers which the individual woman does not have control over since their roots are embedded in our organizations and our society” (p. 28).

Results from studies by Alston (1996), Bush (2000), Chambers (1979), Celestin (2003), Coleman (1998), Hudson (1994), Jones-Mitchell (1993), and Revere (1985) pointed to the following external challenges: exclusion from the old boys’ network and other informal networks, lack of role models of the same race and/or gender, societal attitudes that African Americans lack competency in leadership positions, the double bind/double jeopardy of race and gender, lack of awareness of political maneuvers,
gender stereotypes, lack of mentors, professional socialization, and professional positioning. Of these external challenges, participants in six studies (Bush, 2000; Chambers, 1979; Coleman, 1998; Doughty, 1977; Jones-Mitchell, 1993; and Revere, 1985) indicated that the double bind of race and gender discrimination was the most prevalent obstacle for African American women in their ascent to and during their service in the superintendency. Respondents in four studies (Bulls, 1986; Bradley-White, 1997; Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000; and Jones-Mitchell, 1993) noted that the lack of mentors posed a major hurdle for them.

Referring to the dual discrimination experienced by African American women, King (1988) noted that Frances Beal (1970) had “introduced the term ‘double jeopardy’” (p. 46) in Beal’s essay “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” (pp. 90–100). However, intersecting oppressions have been the African American woman’s daily reality since her arrival in Colonial America. In her address to the National American Women’s Suffrage Association in 1898, Mary Church Terrell, President of the National Association of Colored Women, stated:

For, not only are colored women with ambition and aspiration handicapped on account of their sex, but they are everywhere baffled and mocked on account of their race. Desperately and continuously they are forced to fight that opposition, born of a cruel, unreasonable prejudice which neither their merit nor their necessity seems to subdue. Not only because they are women, but because they are colored women, are discouragement and disappointment meeting them at every turn. (para. 4)

Doughty (1980) asserted that being African American and female subjected African American women to “two negatives simultaneously” (p. 165), which often deterred women from wanting to enter educational administration. In her discussion of racism and sexism, Banks (1999) noted that both factors of discrimination were
“transmitted to new members of society through socialization” (p. 67). Also, she argued that “even though White women lack social, political, and economic power, they enjoy a privileged status in U.S. society based on their race” (p. 67) whereas “women of color experience discrimination based on two factors, race and sex” (p. 67).

Based on her study of variables influencing the tenure of African American women and men superintendents and White American woman, Jones-Mitchell (1993) concluded that race and gender were the dominant issues for African American women superintendents. Eighty percent of the 10 African American women in Coleman’s (1998) study identified racial discrimination as a barrier to their career advancement in Minnesota. In her study of five African American women and five White women superintendents in Illinois, Harrison-Williams (2000) focused secondarily on career barriers to the superintendency for these women. While all five African American women participants expressed their experience with gender discrimination, only three of the five African American women described racial discrimination. The majority of the 22 African American women superintendents in Revere’s (1985) research indicated that “there existed biased and racist attitudes on the part of those individuals who made decisions” (p. 127), forcing them to feel the need to be “twice as good, even three times as good to overcome the sexist and racist attitudes levied toward them” (pp. 127–128). One participant in Harrison-Williams’ (2000) research stated that “The gender and race issues entered as obstacles that I continue to work to overcome as a result of being female and African American” (pp. 108–109).

Although the 10 participants (8 African American and 2 Hispanic women superintendents) in Bush’s (2000) study of members of the Council of Great City Schools
denied any impact of race and gender in their present positions, they indicated having experienced the negativity of being a minority and a female at some point during their educational administration career (p. v). In her research on African American women superintendents’ perceptions of encountered constraints and facilitators enroute to the superintendency, Alston (1996) found that, in comparison to other issues, “the issues of racism and gender bias presented the least of worries” (p. 72) to participants.

Interestingly, Bush (2000) concluded that, for some of the respondents, the line between race and gender discrimination was sometimes blurred (p. 124) in that discerning the racial issues from the gender issues often became difficult. Jones and Montenegro (1983) noted that “many times they [minority women] cannot determine which ‘ism’ they are up against” (p. 22) since the barriers they face are “common to their sex as well as to their race” (p. 22).

Contrary to the relatively high number of external challenges that researchers determined as prevalent issues for African American women ascending to the superintendency, the research of Harrison-Williams (2000) was 1 of 10 studies in which participants described an internal challenge. In her study of five African American women and five White women Illinois superintendents, Harrison-Williams (2000) concluded that a lack of confidence was a challenge to the ascent to the superintendency experienced by three of the African American participants as well as by four of the White participants.

Overcoming the obstacles encountered in their ascent to the superintendency did not negate new and, sometimes, the continuation of old challenges that African American women superintendents faced while serving in that position. In their research, Barren-
Alexander (2000), Bradley-White (1997), Chambers (1979), Collins (2002), Jones-Mitchell (1993), and Revere (1985) concluded that the following were some of the challenges: racism and sexism, exclusion from informal networking, balancing their personal life with their professional life, politics, school board issues, and isolation. While 1 participant in Barrens-Alexander’s (2000) study acknowledged “the importance of being able to play the political game without losing sight of the real mission” (p. 67), all participants emphasized the “challenge of the school board” (p. 64). The African American women superintendents in Revere’s (1985) study “believed they must project a superwoman image” (p. 126). Collins (2002) and Bradley-White (1997) found that African American women superintendents felt the isolation of the position as they stood alone after having made a difficult decision, their present position had pulled them away from their political and spiritual supporters, or they learned that the “isolation resulted from being in the top level position” (p. 284).

Exiting the Superintendency

Although not recent phenomena (Tyack & Hansot, 1982; Wilson, 1960), both turnover and tenure patterns in the most powerful position in public schools, the superintendency, have captured the interest of many researchers (Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Council of the Great City Schools, 2001; National School Boards Association’s Council of Urban Boards of Schools, 2001; Natkin, Cooper, & Fusarelli, 2002; Yee & Cuban, 1996). Additionally, as a single critical issue, superintendent turnover or moving from district-to-district (Hall & Difford, 1992) has been addressed in other studies (Buchanan, 2006; Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Cunningham & Hentges, 1982; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Giles & Giles, 1990a; Giles & Giles, 1990b; Glass, 1992;
Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Considering that the superintendency remains “the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States” (Bjork, 2000, p. 8), not surprisingly, most of the studies addressing “turnover and tenure patterns in the superintendency have been dominated by male samples, with infrequent disaggregating of data by gender” (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993, p. 1) and by race. As researchers delved into the various aspects of turnover (i.e., rates of, reasons for, size of districts and their communities, the chaos, the mobility paths of the departed superintendents), data have revealed that not all superintendents moved from district to district, and some completely exited the position (Giles & Giles, 1990a, 1990b; Hall & Difford, 1992; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993).

In their survey *State Administrators Association Research on the Directors’ Perception of the Exiting Superintendent*, Hall and Difford (1992) focused on the “rate and frequency of turnover” (p. 1) in the superintendency in selected state school districts. Noting that superintendent turnover was one consequence of the stressful, conflictive, and challenging role, Hall and Difford (1992) discerned a second consequence (i.e., superintendents exiting from their careers before normal retirement). Hall and Difford explored this usually unnoticed phenomenon of the superintendent’s premature exiting by interviewing five state administrator association executives “to see what their perspective on the exiting phenomenon would be and what sorts of data they might have available” (p. 7). The results of these interviews and a look at the analyses of superintendent turnover data from Colorado (1990–91) and Indiana (1981–90) led researchers to these conclusions:

1. Individual instances of the exiting phenomenon exist.
2. The extent and rate of the exiting phenomenon are not clear.

3. A variation in the trend [of exiters] may depend upon the state where the increase in turnover is related in part to changes in retirement policies (p. 15).

Interestingly, in their investigation of California’s high turnover of superintendents between 1982 and 1989 (i.e., 468 out of 1,002 superintendents left positions), the results of Giles and Giles’ (1990a) research also indicated the numbers of superintendents who left a position but

1. did not move to other California superintendencies within 2 years of the study (80% of 468)
2. accepted involuntary, unplanned retirement (6.62% of 468)
3. accepted lesser ranked administrative positions (13.7% of 468)
4. were unaccounted for (38.68% of 468; p. 5).

Giles and Giles (1990a) did not apply the term exiters to those superintendents who did not continue their careers in the superintendency, either by choice or by dictate. However, exiters, as defined in later studies (Hall & Difford, 1992; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993), seemed applicable to the superintendent population in Giles and Giles’ (1990a) study.

A review of the literature relevant to women in the superintendency revealed major voids in these two key areas: turnover in the superintendency and exit from the superintendency. As previously noted, scholarship on African American women in the superintendency has addressed various issues and themes; yet more conspicuous is the profound dearth of literature on African American women who exit the superintendency.
Schmuck, Hollingsworth, and Lock (2002) suggested these three reasons for the scarcity of this literature:

1. The relatively low numbers of women in school administration have made it difficult to find women school leaders for the purpose of research or to document their experiences of leaving.

2. Existing data about exiting administrators have not been gathered with sex as a variable.

3. The difficulty in gathering data may depend on the sensitivity of the topic (pp. 96–97).

Thus, little definitive literature is available on the turnover, tenure, or exit of women in general, and more specifically, of African American women in the superintendency. In fact, Shakeshaft (1994) argued:

Understanding how long women remain in high-pressure administrative positions opens up a number of questions. Do they leave because they arrive in administration later in their careers, and thus are closer to retirement? Do they leave because the rewards of the position—status and money—are outweighed by the costs (lost of family time, less personal time, lack of connections, undue focus on public politics? Do women leave the superintendency if they have difficulties with their boards? And, if so, do they leave because, unlike male superintendents who are still seen as desirable candidates in another district, females get only one chance? Might it be that if the relationship between a woman superintendent and her board sours, other districts no longer see her as a good candidate for superintendent making it impossible for her to move into a superintendency? (p. 359)

Fourteen qualitative studies, one quantitative study, and one mixed methodology inquiry have focused on these and similar questions regarding the exits of superintendents, both women and men. Of these existing studies, seven addressed women (Allen, 1996; Beekley, 1994; Pino, 1997; Rivers, 2007; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993, 1994). From these seven studies, scholars (Pino, 1997;
Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Tallerico, Poole, & Burstyn, 1994) generated data about issues other than their original questions on women exiting the superintendency. While seven other studies focused on both men and women (Czaja & Harman, 1997, 1999; Czarnecki, 1996; Freese, 2003; Metzer, 1997; Rauche, 2001; Williams, 2007), one study (Cleek, 1986) dealt only with men.

Although Jackson (1999) and Pino (1997) dealt with the exiting phenomenon in relationship to women, this phenomenon was not the main focus of the research. While the exiting of African American women from the superintendency was addressed in Jackson’s (1999) research, Rivers’ (2007) study was specific to African American women who exited the superintendency. As a result of their research, both authors identified the exiting issue as critical.

The research conducted on women exiting the superintendency was descriptive in nature. Studies that focused on the reasons former women superintendents prematurely departed from their positions, their demographic characteristics, and their perceptions of their superintendent experiences typically utilized questionnaire and interview data. While two researchers (Beekley, 1994; Rivers, 2007) used the case–study design and data from personal interviews for research, Allen (1996), Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole (1993) collected data through telephone interviews. Table 3 is illustrative of exit studies, their research designs, the number and gender of the studies’ participants, and exit type.
Table 3

Research on Exiting Superintendents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
<th>Number &amp; Gender of Participants</th>
<th>Exit Type</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Rivers</td>
<td>4 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Williams</td>
<td>6 Women 12 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Freese</td>
<td>6 Women 16 Men</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Rausch</td>
<td>1 Woman 22 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Czajz &amp; Harman</td>
<td>38 Women &amp; Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Czaja &amp; Harman</td>
<td>23 Women &amp; Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Metzer</td>
<td>39 Women &amp; Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Pino</td>
<td>17 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>20 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Czarnecki</td>
<td>3 Woman 3 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Tallerico &amp; Burstyn</td>
<td>10 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Beekley</td>
<td>4 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Tallerico, Burstyn, &amp; Poole</td>
<td>4 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Tallerico, Burstyn, &amp; Poole</td>
<td>20 Women 0 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Giles &amp; Giles</td>
<td>372 Women &amp; Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Cleek</td>
<td>0 Women 12 Men</td>
<td>V/I</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. V = Voluntary; I = Involuntary

In the studies addressing men and women, only one researcher (Williams, 2007) delineated her findings by gender. However, the findings from such research indicated that exiting factors included personnel issues, district financial problems, racial and ethical issues, and the political agendas of board members (Metzer, 1997). Conflicts with school board members, being tired of the position, and personal or spousal illness were exiting factors that Rausch (2001) cited. According to Williams, issues such as cultural fit, fired for the reason hired (i.e., to improve schools), the role of search firms, and the absence of innate leadership skills also contributed to the non-renewal of contracts, or the
involuntary and voluntary departure of superintendents. In contrast to other studies, Freese (2003) categorized the results of his study into the following three exiting domains: positional (e.g., politics, board relations, workloads, and pressures); individual (e.g., compatibility, efficacy, stress, professional interests, life balance, and new challenges); and external (e.g., recruitment/opportunity, family/spousal, environment, financial security, and community; pp. 201–202).

The factors contributing to women’s premature exit from the superintendency can be categorized into two fairly distinct areas: (1) pushes and (2) pulls (Allen, 1996; Tallerico et al., 1993). According to Tallerico et al. (1993), pulls, associated with voluntary exits, were “attractions drawing respondents away from their superintendencies toward other options or interests” (p. 5), while pushes, associated with involuntary exits, were those issues that pressured respondents to leave their superintendencies. Beekley (1994) categorized her findings as cultural/social, organizational, and personal issues. For the former women superintendents in her study, she cited, as primary exiting factors, cultural discrimination, organizational marginality, and diminished personal quality of life (p. 131). Most of these issues can be equated to both the pulls and pushes noted in other studies.

Tallerico et al. (1993) and Allen (1996) listed these pulls:

**External Pulls**

- New job opportunities
- Larger communities to serve
- Better pay
Internal Pulls

- Child-rearing concerns
- Personal mission
- Marriage

What kinds of positions served as attractors and why were these roles considered attractive? Tallerico et al. (1993) found that central office positions were highly favored options because these jobs offer access to districts of higher status as opposed to the rural and poor districts from which the respondents may have exited. Also, central office positions usually offered better salaries. While a few respondents indicated being attracted to university professorships with less stress and scrutiny and an opportunity to contribute positively to the training of future administrators, two decided that the principalship was a better educational venue for their interests. Community college positions were the top choices of the former women superintendents in Allen’s (1996) study.

In contrast to the small number of pulls, the number of pushes was overwhelmingly higher. Tallerico et al. (1993) concluded that these pushes contributed to women exiting the superintendency:

Pushes: Political Factors

- School board dysfunction: issues focused on the deterioration of the superintendent-board relationship
- Union influence: special interest groups (teachers and administrators) effectively orchestrated board turnover during elections, pressured individual
board members to advocate a certain stance, and mobilized citizens in the wider community for special purposes

- Non-educational foci: superintendents in poor rural districts or in urban districts with significant problems indicated that their time was consumed by financial, budget, and facilities issues that pulled them away from an instructional focus

- Moral or ethical clashes: taking an ethical stand on issues such as blowing the whistle on illegal or inappropriate fiscal activities of some board members and/or other personnel, recommending dismissal of individual teachers or administrators or insisting on affirmative action often lost respondents the support of their board members (pp. 8–9).

**Pushes: Sex-Typed Expectations**

- Perceptions of malleability: One respondent asserted that she likely was “hired because the board felt they could manipulate a woman more easily than they could a man” (p. 11).

- Remuneration: Board members assumed that some female superintendents would work for a lower salary than would male superintendents.

- Interpersonal treatment: Several participants provided evidence of being bullied by individual board members or other district personnel; in addition, they noted the negative tone of language used by board members when interacting with women.

- Scrutiny: In the words of one respondent, “Women are looked at much more closely than men are. What we wear. Everything” (p. 11).
Performance standards: Whether women superintendents assumed the traditional male model of leadership (“take chargedness” and assertion) or the stereotypically female (nurturing and collaborative), they could be penalized on either account.

Knowledge domains: Many examples related to gender biases in others’ assumptions about what men and women know.

Informal support: The lateral support systems that develop among male superintendents in social settings or on the golf course, for example, were generally viewed as less available to females (pp. 11–12).

Location of opportunities: The vast majority of the sample worked in either small rural districts (if they were White) or problematic urban districts (if African American), not easy places to be a superintendent (pp. 11–12).

Specific only to African American women who experienced premature job separation from the superintendency, Rivers’ (2007) narrative case studies of four former African American women superintendents revealed that politics, gender, race, and superintendent/school board relationships were the primary exit factors. With the exception of race as a standout factor, the three other reasons for involuntary/voluntary departure were analogous to the pushes and pulls found in the study conducted by Tallerico et al. (1993).

In the second focus of her study, Jackson (1999) indicated that exiting factors of former African American women superintendents were comparable to those found in other voluntary and involuntary exiting studies. Exiting factors among these women included conflicts with school board members, constant turnover of school board
members who wanted to select their own superintendent, changes in state law (no specific laws given), failure of voters to approve higher taxes, and lack of support by the mayor and officials in city government (p. 154).

In sum, according to researchers, both men and women do voluntarily and involuntarily exit the superintendency. However, few researchers have addressed the exiting phenomenon as it relates to women, and even fewer have addressed the issues in relation to African American women. In the existent research literature, Beekley (1994) concluded that, in addition to the issues common to all superintendents, there are “issues which are exacerbated by gender and issues that are unique to women superintendents” (p. 123). Tallerico et al. (1993) and Allen (1996) suggested that gender issues often compound the common problems in the already vulnerable superintendent position and may have led to the exits of women from the superintendency.

Summary

Denied basic human rights and their history, “the extraordinary achievements of black women in the 17th through 20th centuries did not grow out of degradation but out of a legacy of courage, resourcefulness, initiative, and dignity that goes back to 1619” (Hine & Thompson, 1998, p. 4). Being subjected to legalized restrictions imposed because of their race and gender, African American women persisted in their efforts to overcome the intellectual inferiority status assigned to them by members of the dominant culture. The unique complexities of their lives gave rise to, among several realities, a sense of community “developed in the slave quarters” (Hine & Thompson, 1998, p. 5), which placed a priority on their education, the education of their daughters and sons, and laid the foundation for the uplifting of their race.
Before the Civil War, both enslaved and free African Americans risked their lives to learn and teach. The research of Hine and Thompson (1997, 1998) and Woodson (1968) indicated that if a slave owner chose to educate a slave, an African American male was selected over an African American woman. African American women were not afforded equal chances to become educated. However, in spite of limited and unequal educational opportunities throughout history, numerous African American women struggled to become the teachers, founders of schools, social as well as political activists, and leaders.

A comprehensive review of the literature first indicated a dearth of research on African American women in educational administration. Second, the review revealed that the contemporary African American woman has continued “the tradition of involvement and leadership in education” (Berry & Blassingame, 1982, p. 289). In the leadership arena, African American women primarily occupy positions such as elementary school principals, supervisors, consultants, administrative assistants, and deputy superintendents (Barrens-Alexander, 2000; Harrison-Williams, 2000; Revere, 1985). Not surprisingly, then, African American women remain an underutilized resource, specifically in the public school superintendency, where the most recent national study (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000) indicated that only 5.1% of the superintendents were African American women.

Finally, Allen (1996), Beekley (1994), and Tallerico, Poole, and Burstyn (1993) suggested that once women have broken through the glass ceiling and overcome the hurdles to attain the highest administrative position in the American public school organization, they exit before their contracts expire. If this problem is to be solved,
research studies such as this one need to be conducted to gather information from women who have experienced the pressures. From this information, perhaps strategies can be developed to keep talented African American women in the superintendency and encourage others to consider the profession as a career option.

Superintendent turnover (movement from one superintendency to another) does exist. However, as Hall and Difford (1992) asserted, “A subset of superintendents are [sic] exiting that is being neglected in the turnover studies” (p. 6). Therefore, the frame of reference in this study is exiting, and the African American woman superintendent as exiter, a previous research blind spot, is the subject.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this investigation, the researcher used qualitative methods to explore and gain insights into the major factors influencing the decision of eight African American women public school district superintendents to exit the public school superintendency, voluntarily or involuntarily, before retirement. Turnover in the superintendency has been the subject of several research studies (Buchanan, 2006; Byrd, Drews, & Johnson, 2006; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carella, 2000; Council of the Great City Schools, 2001; Cunningham & Hentges, 1982; Czaja & Harman, 1997; Giles & Giles, 1990a, 1990b; Hall & Difford, 1992; Metzer, 1997; National School Boards Association’s Council of Urban Boards of Education, 2001; Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002; Natkin, Cooper, & Fusarelli, 2002; Yee & Cuban, 1996) as has been the examination of data seeking to establish the existence of an exit phenomenon among Caucasian male and female superintendents (Allen, 1996; Beekley, 1994; Cleek, 1986; Czaja & Harman, 1999; Czarnecki, 1996; Freese, 2003; Giles & Giles, 1990a, 1990b; Hall & Difford, 1992; Pino, 1997; Rausch, 2001; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993; Williams, 2007).

Although primarily through dissertation studies, within the last 20–25 years an increase has been noted in the research chronicling the African American woman superintendent (Alston, 1999, 2000, 2005; Barrens-Alexander, 2000; Bulls, 1986; Celestin, 2003; Cormier, 2007; Daye, 2007; Fields, 2006; Harrison-Williams, 2000; Herring, 2007; Hosier, 2002: Jackson, 1999; January, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Kennedy, 2008; Newton, 2003; Ragin, 2004; Revere, 1985; Rowan, 2006; Sanders-Lawson, 2001; Watt, 1995; Williams, 2007). Moreover, little information has surfaced about the retention of these women in or their exit from the superintendency (Rivers, 2007).
This chapter contains a description of the research methodology and procedures used in the inquiry about the experiences and perceptions of selected African American women who left their superintendencies. Specifically, these topics will be explored: research questions, research design, protection of the rights of human subjects and informed consent, phenomenological focus, critical race theory as the conceptual framework, the role of the researcher, research procedures, thematic analysis, and credibility.

Research Questions

With the continued under-representation of African American women in the public school superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007), the phenomenon of African American women prematurely exiting, voluntarily or involuntarily, from the superintendency was the subject of this research. The overarching questions of this study were as follows: What predominant factors caused African American women superintendents to exit, either voluntarily or involuntarily, from the superintendency and what priceless first-hand knowledge can be acquired from their lived experiences? To explore the exit phenomenon more thoroughly, the following three secondary questions were addressed:

**Question 1:** How do African American women superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as public school superintendents?

**Question 2:** Did either race and/or gender have an impact on their superintendencies? What were the situations or circumstances?
Question 3: While serving as the superintendent, what were the major challenges that were encountered? What strategies were used to overcome effectively these challenges?

While a third research question—about challenges encountered during the superintendency and strategies used in meeting them—was initially posed as a separate line of inquiry, responses did not fall into any neat category. Instead, interviewees almost automatically integrated information about the challenges they faced and the solutions used to confront these challenges in answering virtually every question to which they responded. In essence, the third secondary research question, having been indirectly covered when answering other queries, was eliminated from the research paradigm.

Question 4: What advice would they give to aspiring African American women about career preparation, experiences, competencies, and overall guidance in terms of how to achieve longevity in the public school superintendency?

To elude explicit, comprehensive, rich, and vivid descriptions of the context and process of these experiences in the public school superintendency, additional open-ended interview questions were formulated under each research question. To improve the initial interview guide, the researcher pilot tested the interview questions with selected subjects matching the study criteria.
Research Design

The power of using the qualitative paradigm to explore the superintendency and exiting experiences of African American women who held the position rested in the key characteristics of all qualitative data, as expressed by Merriam (2002):

Qualitative research attempts to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant’s perspective. . . . All qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product. (p. 6)

Furthermore, Susan Chase (1995) postulated that the comprehensively sound qualitative research presented by the scholars in Brunner’s (1999) *Sacred Dreams: Women and the Superintendency* afforded readers the opportunity to listen to the stories—the lives, the cries, the laughter—of women who struggle with persistent racial and gender barriers; who develop strategies for surviving and sometimes thriving in an unwelcoming world that does not acknowledge its hostility; who seek from family and friends the sustenance they need to continue in a job that is overwhelmingly exhausting, even when it offers satisfaction; and who decide to leave superintendencies as a result of discrimination and unresolved traumas. All of these stories need to be heard especially by women who are just now daring to think about leadership positions for themselves. (p. 222)

Jackson (1999) advocated for a more “complete story” (p. 157) to be told by former and present African American women superintendents, for society “needs to hear their voices loud and clear” (p. 157). Brunner and Grogan (2007) concurred, indicating that a fuller story of the superintendency primarily occupied by White males results from the inclusion of the voices of “women and people of color” (p. 5), who are much fewer in number.

Qualitative methods, as Maxwell (1996) suggested, are better suited to studying a “relatively small number of individuals and situations and preserve[ing] the individuality
of each of these in analyses rather than collecting data from large samples and aggregating the data across individuals or situations” (pp. 17–19). Furthermore, as Creswell (1998) stated, “. . . a hallmark of qualitative research today is the deep involvement in issues of gender, culture, and marginalized groups” (p. 19). Thus, using qualitative methods to study these variables inclusive of race, with African American women as the unit of analysis, will allow a deeper understanding of the totality of these women’s experiences in the context of the superintendency.

Protection of the Rights of Human Subjects and Informed Consent

Several scholars (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Cone & Foster, 2006; Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Schram, 2003) addressed various ethical issues that can arise when field research involves human participants. Moreover, in 1974, federal government officials established a requirement that “all universities accepting federal funding for research involving human subjects” (Glesne, 1999, p. 114) must establish institutional review boards (IRBs). Thus, prior to any contact with potential pilot-study or full-research participants, the researcher submitted Eastern Michigan University’s IRB Faculty/Doctoral Human Subjects Request for Approval Form. Upon receipt of the IRB’s approval (Appendix A), the researcher followed the procedures outlined in the dissertation research proposal to commence the study.

“Participants’ informed consent is a key element in ethically conducted research. Informed consent is a process and includes both informing prospective participants of what their participation in the research will likely entail and obtaining their written agreement to participate” (Cone & Foster, 2006, p. 145). Therefore, prior to the initiation
of the research interview, each participant was asked to sign the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), which included the following elements:

- how confidentiality of data and their privacy would be protected
- anonymity
- their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty
- voluntary participation
- knowledge of any risks
- the focus of the research
- how the research will be reported
- how the research will be shared (Glesne, 1999, pp. 113–117).

Phenomenological Focus

Several strategies are associated with the qualitative research paradigm (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, case study, phenomenology, biography, hermeneutics, etc.). Although commonalities exist in perpetrating research in each of these human science approaches (Moustakas, 1994), each one maintains a distinctively unique mode of inquiry. The nature of this study lends itself, as explained by Patton (1990), to one “with a phenomenological focus, a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world— in which case one can use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomenon oneself” (p. 70). An umbrella term, phenomenology encompasses various orientations, approaches, schools, and traditions (Byrd, 2001; Dowling, 2007; Munhall, 2007; Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 2002). According to Patton (2002), phenomenology
can refer to a philosophy (Husserl, 1967), an inquiry paradigm (Lincoln, 1990), an interpretive theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b: 14), a social science analytical perspective or orientation (Harper, 2000: 727; Shultz, 1967, 1970), a major qualitative tradition (Creswell, 1998), or a research methods framework (Moustakas, 1994). Varying forms complicate the picture even more: transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic phenomenology offer different nuances of focus. (p. 104)

Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) included an empirical transcendental concept in his human science model of phenomenology, while Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1997), and Polkinghorne (1989) described a phenomenological psychology with delineated research methods. The commonality in these variants of phenomenology, as observed by Patton (2002), is

a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness both individually and as shared meaning. This requires methodologically, carefully and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others. To gather such data, one must undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest; that is they have “lived experience” as opposed to “secondhand experience.” (p. 104)

Drawing from Van Manen’s (2002) reference to human science scholars, this researcher used an “eclectic approach to the tradition of phenomenology” (para. 3).

Throughout his text, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, Van Manen (1990) synonymously used the words human science and phenomenology (p. 2). Concurring with Moustakas (1994) that human science is inclusive of “a variety of approaches and orientations” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 181), Van Manen (1990) defined human science as “the study of meaning: descriptive-interpretive studies of patterns, structures and levels of experiential and/or textual meaning” (p. 181) that focus on “explicating the meaning of human phenomena and at understanding the
lived structures of meanings (such as in phenomenological studies of the lifeworld)” (p. 6). Maintaining that the core of phenomenological research begins and ends with the lived experience, Van Manen (1990) conceptualized phenomenological research as

- the study of lived experience;
- the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness;
- the study of essences;
- the description of experiential meanings we live as we live them;
- the human scientific study of phenomena;
- the attentive practice of thoughtfulness;
- a search for what it means to be human; and
- a poetizing activity. (pp. 3–13)

Adopting this phenomenological focus conflated with the purpose of investigating the lived experience of African American women who served as public school superintendents and exited that position. The essence of these lived experiences can be described as both unique individual experiences and as one common experience shared by all of the participants.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory begins with a number of basic insights. One is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity—rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and whites (for example) alike—can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi)

Several critical race theory (CRT) scholars (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Lawrence, Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) traced the conception of the CRT movement to the mid-to late-1970s. During these years, a shared frustration, rooted in the stagnated progress toward racial reform using customary approaches (e.g., “filing amicus briefs, marching, coining new litigation
strategies, writing articles in legal and popular journals exhorting our fellow citizens to exercise moral leadership in the search of racial justice” [Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi]) of the 1960s civil rights movement, united legal scholars like Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and other lawyer activists. These strategies began to produce fewer gains against discrimination for people-of-color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As Lawrence et al. (1993) posited, “The consciousness of critical race theory as a movement or group and the movement’s intellectual agenda were forged in oppositional reaction to visions of race, racism, and law dominant in the past civil rights period” (p. 3). The “social origins” of critical race theory, according to Kimberle Crenshaw, emerged in 1981 (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Lawrence et al., 1993). Furthermore, Crenshaw et al. (1995) cited these two events as crucial to the growth of CRT as a movement

1. The student protest, boycott, and organization of an alternative course on race and law at Harvard Law School in 1981—an event that highlights the significance of Derrick Bell and the Critical Legal Studies movement to the ultimate development of Critical Race Theory, and symbolizes Critical Race Theory’s oppositional posture vis-à-vis the liberal mainstream.
2. The 1987 Critical Legal Studies National Conference on silence and race, which marked the genesis of an intellectually distinctive critical account of race on terms set forth by race-conscious scholars of color, and the terms of contestations and coalition with Critical Legal Studies. (p. xix)

Since, according to Crenshaw et al. (1995), “There is no canonical set of doctrines or methodologies to which we all subscribe” (p. xiii), they and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) noted that CRT is based on five to six premises, themes, or insights to which a majority of CRT scholars adhere, beginning with the ordinariness of racism; “. . . and this racism has shaped laws and policies of U.S. institutions” (Parker, 1998, p. 43). Solorzano (1997), who defined CRT as a “framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structured and cultural
aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color” (p. 6), drew from other CRT scholars in defining five of these themes:

1. The Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism: Race and racism are endemic, permanent in American society.
2. The Challenge to Dominant Ideology: Critical race theory challenges the traditional claims of the legal system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity.
3. The Commitment to Social Justice: An overall commitment to social justice and the elimination of racism exists.
4. The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge: The experiential knowledge of Women and Men of Color is recognized as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching the law and its relation to racial subordination.
5. The Interdisciplinary Perspective: Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism in the law by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods. (pp. 6–7)

The sixth premise of CRT, offered by Lawrence et al. (1993), was the eradication of “racial oppression” (p. 6) as part of CRT’s comprehensive goal of eliminating other “forms of oppression” (i.e., gender, class, sexual orientation, and other discriminatory factors; p. 6).

In their “commitment to use law to transform and move social institutions toward racial empowerment and emancipation” (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 5), critical race theorists experimented with new forms of CRT writing and lecturing, such as creating chronicles and counter-stories, as well as using storytelling, narratives, metaphorical tales, parables, biography, autobiography, personal histories, dreams, and poetry (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Lawrence et al., 1993; Lynn & Adams, 2002). Critical race theorists did not assert that these writing approaches were distinctive only to the critical race theory movement but noted that they served “to create new, oppositionist accounts of race” (Crenshaw et al., 1995, p. xiii).
Delgado, one prominent critical race theorist who was key to the historical conceptualization of CRT (Crenshaw et al., 1995), has extensively argued about the “merits and potential contribution of CRT to legal analysis” (Tate, 1997, p. 218). Through his scholarship, he delineated the role of storytelling and counter-stories in CRT. In his 1989 essay, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” Delgado looked into “the use of stories for racial reform” (p. 2415). Maintaining that the White dominant society in which people live justifies its empowered status by means of stories that are their “stock explanations that construct reality in ways favorable to it [White dominant society]” (p. 2438), Delgado (1989) suggested that members of out-groups should also tell stories to counter that reality. The out–groups to which he referred were “groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective—whose consciousness—has been suppressed, devalued and abnormalized” (p. 2412). Delgado (1989) offered the following three additional reasons justifying the use of voice scholarship in CRT: (1) Provides a cogent means for destroying and changing mindsets, (2) Contains community-building functions, and (3) Affords self-preservation to members of out-groups as well as assists them through the “effect of the oppressor” (p. 2437).

What can critical race theory, a movement that has its roots in legal scholarship, contribute to research in education? Plenty, as it turns out. Much of the national dialogue on race relations takes place in the context of education—in continuing desegregation and affirmative action battles, in debates about bilingual education programs, and in the controversy surrounding race and ethnicity studies departments at colleges and universities. More centrally, the use of critical race theory offers a way to understand how ostensibly race-neutral structures in education—knowledge, truth, merit, objectivity, and “good education” - are in fact ways of forming and policing the racial boundaries of white supremacy and racism. (Roithmayr, 1999, p. 4)
A pivotal linkage has been made between CRT and education using CRT as a “framework for examining: persistent racial inequities in education, qualitative research methods, pedagogy and practice, the schooling experience of marginalized students of color, and the efficacy of race-conscious education policy” (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 247). In fact, Lynn and Parker (2006) reviewed numerous studies in these important areas in their article entitled “Critical Race Studies in Education: Examining a Decade of Research on US Schools.” Along with Dixson and Rousseau (2006), they credited Ladson-Billings and Tate’s 1994 presentation (published in 1995) at the American Education Research Association (AERA) annual meeting as the first attempt to connect CRT to “education theory and practice” (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 264). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) set out to “theorize race and use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity” (p. 47). Lynn and Parker (2006) suggested that Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) investigation, which was predicated on the following three propositions, “helped to explain how a critical analysis of racism in education could lead to the development of new ways to think about the failure of schools to properly educate minority populations” (p. 264):

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining equity in the United States.
2. U.S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social and consequently school inequity. (p. 47)

Publications by Tate (1997) and Taylor (1998) also provided cogent linkages between CRT and education (Lynn & Parker, 2006). While Tate (1997) presented a broad historical overview of CRT and its nexus to critical legal studies, he also discussed the potential use of CRT in both the education research community and in education in general. In addition to Taylor’s (1998) discussion of CRT as oppositional scholarship that
takes exception to the “experiences of whites as the normative standard” (p. 122), his extension of CRT to education emphasized using the “authentic voices of people of color” (p. 123), taking that experiential knowledge to raise “critical questions about educational research and re-segregation via practices such as tracking” (p. 123).

In “Just what is Critical Race Theory, and What’s it doing in a Nice Field like Education?” Ladson-Billings (1999) used CRT to examine curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation. As a result of her analysis, Ladson-Billings (1999) concluded that the proponent of CRT:

1. sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script which means that stories of African Americans are muted and erased when they challenge dominant culture authority and power;
2. suggests that current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient;
3. sees intelligence testing as a movement to legitimize African American students’ deficiency under the guise of scientific rationalism;
4. argues that inequality in school funding is a function of institutional and structural racism and that the import of property provides another way to consider the funding disparity; and
5. argues that, rather than serving as a solution to social inequity, school desegregation has been promoted only in ways that advantage Whites. (pp. 22–26)

In his earlier writings, Tate (1993) had introduced CRT into education, specifically K-12 education policy, using certain tenets of CRT in an examination of the proposed national assessment in mathematics and, thus, revealed the racial bias in United States standardized testing. In addition to using his autobiographical voice, another CRT tool, to “describe the connection between my elementary education and an equitable mathematics education for African American children” (p. 248), Tate (1994) also explored how the “voice of an African American mathematics educator can be marginalized in academic discourse” (p. 248).
Credited with publishing the first scholarship (Lynn & Parker, 2006), but not the only (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lynn, 1999; 2002; Morris, 2001; Revilla & Asato, 2002), using CRT to examine K–12 teacher education, Solorzano (1997) asserted that racial stereotypes (popular and professional media) were the driving forces behind the justification of “certain teacher attitudes and behaviors toward Students of Color” (p. 7). These same stereotypes served to “maintain” the continued “subordination” of these students (p. 7). Taking exception to the racism and racial stereotyping in K–12 classrooms, Solorzano (1997), using certain tenets of CRT, made suggestions for the elimination of such teacher behavior. In a later publication, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) conflated the five CRT themes to a CRT in teacher education, including these elements:

1. recognizes the central role racism has played in the structuring of schools and schooling practices, and how racism intersects with other forms of subordination including sexism and classism;
2. examines the system of education as part of a critique of societal inequality;
3. is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression;
4. . . . can utilize methods such as storytelling, narratives, chronicles, family history, scenarios, biographies, and parables to draw on the strength of the lived experiences students bring to the classroom; and
5. . . . can look also to such frameworks as Chicana/o, African American, Asian American, Native American, and Women Studies in examining the educational experiences of students of color. (pp. 2–3)

Between 1998 and 2005, the editors of educational research journals such as the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (1998), Qualitative Inquiry (2002), Equity and Excellence in Education (2002), and Race, Ethnicity, and Education (2005) devoted entire special issues to CRT and qualitative research in education. Articles contained in the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education (1998) highlighted the connections of CRT to school desegregation, curriculum and instruction,
and affirmative action as well as CRT’s limitations in examining race and ethnicity in relation to Chicanos and Latinos.

In *Qualitative Inquiry* (2002), the content focused on “a variety of historical, methodological, and epistemological issues as they relate to the scope and trajectory of educational research in the 21st century . . .” while challenging “the dominant notions about race and racism in the context of education and qualitative research” (Lynn, Yosso, Solorzano, & Parker, 2002, p. 5). Particularly noteworthy in this journal was the revelation of a critical race methodology as proposed by Solorzano and Yosso (2002) and by which qualitative research may be carried out. In their article “Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research,” Solorzano and Yosso (2002) defined a critical race methodology as a theoretically grounded approach to research that (a) foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; . . . challenges the separate discourses on race, gender, and class by showing how these three elements intersect to affect the experiences of students of color; (b) challenges the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories used to explain the experiences of students of color; (c) offers a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; (d) focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of students of color, viewing these experiences as sources of strength; and (e) uses the interdisciplinary knowledge base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law to better understand the experiences of students of color. (p. 24)

In addition to providing Solorzano and Yosso with a tool to use in debunking deficit storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23) about race, racism, sexism, and classism, implementing this methodology allowed them an opportunity to relate to the readers the manner in which counter-stories are constructed and used as “theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical tools to challenge racism, sexism, and classism and work toward social justice” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 23).
Using CRT perspectives, emphasis in the 2002 special issue of *Equity and Excellence in Education* was on “the school and schooling experiences of children and young adults from black, Latino/a, and Asian American communities of color as well as the school structures, policies, and personnel that shape their education and the practices of their teachers” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 87). Editors Lynn and Adams (2002) postulated that the writers used CRT to analyze different discourses such as those identified in their LatCrit Theory definition. They defined LatCrit Theory as “a form of legal scholarship that extends from CRT but moves beyond questions of race and racism to include issues of language, accent, phenotype, ethnic affiliation, religion, and immigration status to the debate regarding social justice for marginalized groups” (Lynn & Adams, 2002, p. 89). In his commentary “Afterword: (E)Racing Education,” Carbado (2002) noted the existence of these two groups of CRT scholars: a “first generation,” (p. 193) including such writers as Cheryl Harris (1992, 1993, 2001); Kimberle Crenshaw (1988, 1989, 1995, 1999); Richard Delgado (1988, 1995a, 1995b, 1997); Angela Harris (1994); Derrick Bell (1987, 1995); and Neil Gotanda among others” (p. 193) and a “second generation that departs in places from the first” (p. 193). He concluded that the critiqued articles retained first-generation flavor.

The impetus behind two scholarly publications, a 2005 special issue of *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, and the book *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God’s Children Got a Song* (2006), was a 2004 AERA symposium that brought together new scholars in addition to those who 10 years earlier had produced the erudition about CRT conflating it with education. As editors of both publications, Dixson and Rousseau (2006) continued to chart the development of CRT with a “new generation of CRT scholars—
those who have come to know CRT in their education classrooms and have made use of it in their scholarly pursuits” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. xii). The three objectives of this symposium, according to Dixson and Rousseau (2006), were:

1. to outline how CRT has been used in educational scholarship over the past decade;
2. to provide examples by both new and established scholars of current work on CRT in education; and
3. to offer an opportunity for the authors of the original paper on CRT in education to reflect upon where the theory had come in the decade since its introduction and to suggest future directions for CRT scholarship in education. (p. 5)

The first-hand knowledge and point of view of persons of color were central to the scholarship produced for the symposium and the book (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). The research presented was based on certain basic CRT tenets and was “ground[ed] in the legal literature on CRT” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 7). Some presentations were predicated upon “constructs from legal studies” (p. 6) that “examine[d] issues of importance in education” (p. 6) while others pulled from “the interdisciplinary nature of CRT to inform scholarship on race in education” (p. 6).

From their review of a decade of research of CRT and education, Lynn and Parker (2006) concluded that a perceptible determination existed “among critical race scholars in education” (p. 275) to produce research, qualitative and/or quantitative, using CRT tenets as the analytic tools to expose racially prejudiced judgments, procedures, and organizations in the educational pipeline and in society at large (p. 275). Dixson and Rousseau (2006), using similarities between African American spirituals and CRT, offered the following pointers to inform and, thus, assist a tyro in understanding CRT. They stressed that a CRT scholar:

1. challenges the dominant stories of a racist U.S. society;
2. acknowledges the permanence of racism while at the same time arguing that this recognition should lead not to despair and surrender but to greater resolve in the struggle; and
3. acknowledges the importance of historical context; and
4. needs to listen to this song with a new ear. If readers [of CRT] are not willing or able to put aside preconceptions and traditional paradigms and “hear” the counter-stories and challenges to the dominant discourse reflected in this work, they are likely to miss the point. (pp. 1–4)

In the fluidity and continuous development of the CRT movement in education as evidenced by a second generation of CRT scholarship (Carbado, 2002; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006), Tate (1999) proposed two criteria “to guide those who claim to be writing from the CRT perspective” (p. 268). The scholarship should:

1. explore the lives, successes, marginalization, and oppression of people of color both within and outside of the academy. This is the foundation of CRT; and
2. build on and expand beyond the scholarship found in the critical legal literature. (pp. 267–268)

The Role of the Researcher

Drawing on the characteristics of the qualitative paradigm as set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Merriam (2002), the researcher “elects to use herself as well as other humans as the primary data-gathering instruments . . .” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). Utilizing the researcher as such denotes the entrance of human biases, values, shortcomings, and judgments into the study that will necessitate continuous and intense scrutiny (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002).

My presentation of the research will determine its authenticity and credibility. Therefore, I must acknowledge my reasons for choosing this area of study. My interest in this study grew out of my own experiences as an African American woman public school educator who has worked most recently as a middle school assistant principal in a large
urban school district. Prior to the experiences in that position are those of an extremely
dedicated classroom teacher and middle school department head. Between 1991 and
2005, school board members in the district in which I was employed had appointed six
superintendents. Two appointees were fillers whose appointments came with special
agendas (i.e., one was appointed to bring financial stability to the district and the second
appointed by the governor at the time of the state takeover). I perceived a major
correlation to exist between superintendent turnover and low student academic
achievement. Entrance into the doctoral program prompted me to investigate this issue
further.

As I delved into the history of the local educational system and superintendent
turnover on the national level, I learned these facts: superintendent turnover was not only
a local issue, but one that nationally reigned in major urban school districts to the point
that some authors (Cooper, Fusaralli, & Carella, 2000; Natkin, Cooper, & Fusarelli, 2002;
Yee & Cuban, 1996) labeled the topic a crisis. At the national level, all superintendents
who left the position did not exit involuntarily (Czaja & Harman, 1997, 1999; Giles &
Giles, 1990a; Hall & Difford, 1992; Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993); some exited
voluntarily before retirement. In my local district between the years 1856 and 2005,
board members and the governor appointed 13 Caucasian male superintendents, 5
African American male superintendents, and 1 African American female superintendent
(Detroit Board of Education, 1942; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Mirel, 1999; Moehlman,
1925). The average time in the position between the years 1856 and 1989 was 8.5 years,
with 7 superintendents maintaining the position between 10 and 23 years; between the
years 1991 and 2005, the average time in the position was 2.3 years; the lone African
American female superintendent had been one of the superintendents to leave within 2.5 years and before the end of her contract.

As an African American woman educator, I was proud of the appointment of an African American female to the superintendency in my school district. I was saddened, dismayed, and disillusioned at her exit. Although she was not the first African American woman superintendent in the nation, she was the first in this particular school district and one of the few to have headed a large urban school district. At the time of her exit, I recall thinking of the possible difficulties she might have encountered in obtaining her superintendent appointment; how she had surmounted these difficulties, the circumstances surrounding her exit, and why she obviously no longer chose to be in a superintendent’s position in any district. A number of years passed before I could attempt to answer the how and what questions pertaining to these issues. I captured the opportunity during my doctoral studies. Although minimal information is available, I read everything I could find to learn as much as I could about the journeys and experiences of past African American women educators, especially those in superintendent positions.

Born and reared in the “Heart of Dixie” during the late Jim Crow years, I have experienced the pain of discrimination on a minute-by-minute basis (e.g., having dealt with the visible and invisible “White Only”/“Colored Only” signs; having been educated in a totally segregated school system fortunately by excellent, majority female, African American teachers; having participated in at least two of the marches in my hometown for the right to enter any public business through the front door, sit and be served anywhere in any restaurant, and watch a movie from any seat in the theater). Based on
these experiences, I never dreamed of the day when African American female principals, let alone superintendents, would exist. Not dreaming the dream in no way meant that I never questioned the lack of African American women in supervisory or administrative positions, nor did I lose hope that one day African American women would occupy these positions.

In addition to my mother and one of my aunts, my role models were these strong southern African American women teachers. Racism was the reason I knew African Americans only taught in African American-populated schools with Caucasian male supervisors and superintendents. Sexism was the reason only African American males were the administrators and principals in these schools. These unforgettable experiences are ingrained memories that travel with me “when and where I enter” (Giddings, 2001, p. 5) into this study of African American women superintendents.

With little exception, I believe that as much as things change, the more they remain the same. Thus, my belief was that racism and sexism were barriers encountered by African American women enroute to and during their superintendencies. In this White male-dominated position, these powerful African American women became anomalies. Furthermore, these issues were challenges that related to the retention in/exit of African American women from the superintendent position. Although the actions were subtle, never blatant, I have dealt with racism and sexism from parents of some students who populated one of the schools in which I worked. Again, never flagrant, the perspicuous actions of fellow graduate students and even a few professors have activated that inner alarm announcing personally directed racism and/or sexism. Sometimes the line between the two forms of discrimination is blurred, but bias is nonetheless present.
Research Procedures

The research procedures used in this study entailed four broad phases. Each phase consisted of two constants, an overview and a step-by-step description of the process undertaken in each phase. The four phases described and utilized in this research were (a) the pilot study (process, feedback), (b) selection of research participants (process), (c) data collection (the research interviews), and (d) data analysis.

Phase One: The Pilot Study

Maxwell (1996, 2005) suggested that the researcher “can design pilot studies specifically to test your ideas or methods and explore their implications or to inductively develop grounded theory” (p. 44). Therefore, prior to the commencement of this investigation, a pilot study consisting of three pilot interviews was conducted to determine the clarity and relevance of the questions in the interview guide, to refine and to revise questions, to gain insight from suggestions of pilot participants, and to determine the appropriate length of the interview before proceeding with the study. Cone and Foster (2006) recommended pilot testing for these explicit reasons:

- to ensure that participants will respond in accord with instructions; to uncover and decide how to handle unanticipated problems; to gauge how long participants will take to finish their tasks; and to learn how to use and check the adequacy of your equipment. (p. 228)

Process

Following the approval of the Institutional Human Subjects Review Board (IRB) of Eastern Michigan University (Appendix A), initially to locate potential participants, the researcher compiled a list of 10 regional school districts in Michigan. Use of the Internet to access the homepage on the website of each district allowed the researcher the opportunity to note the gender and race of each superintendent. The result of this process
was the identification of four incumbent African American women superintendents and their office telephone numbers. Within a week, three telephone calls were made to the offices of these women. A short but thorough message, inclusive of purpose and invitation to participate in a pilot study, was given to the superintendent’s executive assistant, and/or a detailed message was left in the voice mailbox of the superintendent. Contact was made with only one of the superintendents who agreed to participate in the pilot study but never had time available for the interview. Two more successful strategies utilized for identifying the names of potential participants were networking and snowball sampling.

_Pilot-Study Participants_

Participants were three incumbent African American women superintendents serving in one urban school district with an approximate student population of 15,000 and two suburban school districts with student populations of approximately 1,210 and 3,777. Having exited their first superintendent positions, 2 of the 3 participants were in their second superintendency while the third participant was in year five of her first superintendency.

The superintendent whose name was obtained through networking was the first scheduled for the pilot interview following several communications consisting of a detailed voicemail, a personal conversation, and an electronically mailed letter of invitation (Appendix B, inclusive of the draft interview guide [Appendix D]). At the scheduled date and time, the first pilot-test interview took place. Prior to the interview, the researcher introduced herself, gave an overview of the research project, reviewed the contents of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), asked if the participant had
questions, and requested that the participant read and sign the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). Following the interview, the participant completed the draft demographic questionnaire. Using the snowball technique at the conclusion of the first pilot-test interview resulted not only in the names of two potential African American women superintendent participants, but also permission to use the first participant’s name as a reference and an endorser of the study.

The initial contact to the additional two African American women superintendents was an electronically mailed letter of invitation to participate in the pilot study for this research project. Attached to the letter of invitation (Appendix B) was the interview guide (Appendix D). Within a week, a follow-up telephone call was made to the offices of both superintendents, at which time the introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the call were stated. Following the agreement of both superintendents to participate in the pilot study, interview dates and times were set. All pilot-study interviews were held in the offices of the superintendents.

*Pilot-Study Feedback*

The pilot-study interviews documented the suitability of the individual questions in the interview guide (Appendix D). Suggestions offered by the participants facilitated the researcher in finalizing the design for the actual research interviews. A tentative process inclusive of the time needed to set up equipment was also established. Furthermore, and importantly, the researcher tested a variety of technical equipment to identify the ones best suited for the actual research interviews. Both a microcassette with an externally attached microphone and a cassette recorder produced tapes with poor sound quality and could have proven disastrous had only one recorder been used.
Therefore, the researcher purchased a digital recorder. For the second interview, the cassette and the digital recorder were used in case one device malfunctioned. Not only did the digital recorder produce an audio recording with excellent sound quality, the interview was downloadable to the computer. This feature was of tremendous assistance as the researcher transcribed the remaining interviews.

Phase Two: Selection of Research Participants

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasized, “All sampling is done with some purpose in mind” (p. 200). Therefore, in this study the researcher employed a purposeful sampling technique to identify African American women superintendents who had voluntarily or involuntarily exited the superintendency. “Purposeful sampling carries with it the logic and power of selecting information rich cases, the cases from which the researcher can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the research” (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

To locate a national listing of either African American women superintendents or women superintendents in general, telephone contacts were made to three nationally recognized professional educational associations (e.g., the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), and the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). This effort resulted in positive communication and immediate feedback from only one of these organizations. NABSE’s membership director, Mr. Ed Potillo, provided the organization’s latest published membership directory, *Directory of African American Superintendents* (2004), which contained the then-current names of both African American female and male superintendents and school districts with addresses and telephone numbers.
In addition to the directory, which contained the names of 88 female superintendents, the following three sources were used to identify (and were cross-checked for duplication) 115 African American incumbent and former women superintendents: Barrens–Alexander’s 2000 dissertation listed 62 names with school districts, Jackson’s 1999 study identified 24 names with city and state, and 29 names were listed in Revere’s 1985 dissertation. While 17 names were duplications, 81 were incumbents; and 5 were deceased. For the remaining 100 names, this researcher purposely began the process of selecting a targeted number of 15 potential participants from the African American women who met the following criteria: had served in at least one superintendency in an urban, suburban, or rural school district; and whose professional careers were presently in positions other than the public school superintendency (i.e., in a private or public educational venue).

Alternating between the women’s names and their last known school districts, the researcher conducted extensive and in-depth Internet searches pursuing all leads to the point of saturation or until relevant contact information was retrieved. Ultimately, this process resulted in a list of 16 nationwide viable contacts on which were assembled the variables of exit age, total number of superintendencies, state of exited superintendency, years in last superintendency, type of community school district, and student enrollment. Upon completion of this database, which provided additional, detailed information, the first 10 women were selected using the previously established criteria.
Process

People will participate in projects, even research, if asked to help by a trusted colleague, a well-known professional, or a friend. The researcher selected Charles E. Mitchell, President of the Mitchell Group, Incorporated. Dr. Mitchell is a well-known former African American male public school teacher, former public school superintendent, community college president, and university professor of educational leadership. Personal contact with Dr. Mitchell, who has contacts throughout the nation because of his consulting business and who is active in most national leadership professional associations inclusive of the NABSE and AASA, resulted in a letter of endorsement (Appendix E) for this study. Four days subsequent to the mailing of Dr. Mitchell’s letter endorsing this study, complete research packets were mailed to the women in priority order, beginning with the first 10 potential participants. Each research packet included a letter of invitation (Appendix B) to participate in this study, an Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), an interview guide (Appendix D), a biographical sketch of the researcher (Appendix F), and a brief Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix G). Ten days following this mailing, two or more telephone calls were placed or messages were left with executive assistants or in voice mailboxes by the researcher in the attempt to secure the participation of these women. The following problems arose:

- An electronic mail message from one woman indicated her willingness to allow only an hour’s interview regardless of the researcher’s request for two hours because she maintained that race and gender were not issues for her. Yet several months later her comments on these same issues relating to African American women superintendents were reported in a nationally distributed
educational article. She was not one of the finalists selected for inclusion in this research project.

- Another woman who declined to participate explained that she thought some of the questions pertaining to exiting were negative in connotation.

- The address and telephone number of another woman were numbers to the organization for which she worked. Communication with a secretary assured receipt of the research packet and delivery to the former superintendent, but no other information could be disclosed; personal contact was never made.

- After three or more conversations with one potential participant, she declined participation due to ongoing litigation with members of the board of education in her exited school district.

- One woman never gave an available date for an interview even after several conversations and an expressed interest.

- Telephone numbers of two women were inaccurate and led to dead ends.

- Other women never made contact after receipt of the research packet and never responded to the messages left with their secretaries, in voice mailboxes, or to electronic mail invitations.

Ultimately, interviews were scheduled with 7 of the initial 16 potential participants while still maintaining variety in the type of school district served, the size of student population, and the time period during which the superintendency was served. The eighth participant wisely exited one superintendency before the end of her contract and entered another superintendency, where she remains today. This participant initially
became involved in the study as a pilot-test subject, but the content of her interview warranted that she be included in the extended portion of the research.

Once the interview and date were secured, a second research packet was mailed. Included was a confirmation letter (Appendix H) identifying the place and time of the interview and a request for a vita, a self-addressed stamped envelope, the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), and a second copy of the interview guide (Appendix D). Receipt of the vita before the scheduled interview allowed the researcher a brief introduction to the participant, leaving more time for in-depth questions and responses. However, if the vita were not accessible prior to the interview, the researcher completed a Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix G) at the end of the interview. Having the protocol available prior to the interview gave the participant time for thoughtful reflection on all questions, which, in turn, should have provided the researcher with more meaningful information regarding each topic.

Phase Three: Data Collection

As defined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998):

The term data refers to the rough materials researchers collect from the world they are studying: they are the particulars that form the basis of analysis. Data include materials the people doing the study actively record . . . . Data also include what others have created and the researcher finds . . . . Data are both the evidence and the clues. (p. 106)

Among the five traditions (Creswell, 1998) used in qualitative research exist various techniques for gathering data. While Glesne (1999), Maykut and Morehouse (1994), and Merriam (2002) suggested using three methods (i.e., participant observation, interviewing, and document collection), Creswell (1998) and Marshall and Rossman (1999) proposed four inclusive of “audio-visual materials such as photographs, compact
disks, and videotapes” (Creswell, 1998, p. 120). Within each technique is a compendium of approaches for collecting data. According to Creswell (1998), in-depth interviewing plays a central role in the “process of collecting information for a phenomenological study” (p. 122). Thus, to learn about the background lives of the potential and purposely selected participants, in addition to using unobtrusive measures (e.g., newspaper and educational magazine articles, personal vitae, other printed materials, and a brief Demographic Questionnaire [Appendix G]), this researcher selected Kvale’s (1996) research interview as the principal strategy for data collection during this qualitative study.

The Research Interview

Kvale (1996) defined the research interview as an “interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomenon” (p. 6). Kvale’s (1996) research interview set forth 12 aspects that essentially espouse face-to-face, semi-structured to unstructured, in-depth, confidential interviews. The 12 aspects particular to this qualitative research interview approach are as follows:

1. Life World: The topic of the qualitative interview is the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his/her relation to it.
2. Meaning: The qualitative research interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world of the subject. The interviewer registers and interprets the meaning of what is said and how it is said.
3. Qualitative: The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language; it does not aim at quantification.
4. Descriptive: The interview attempts to obtain open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the subject’s life world.

5. Specificity: Descriptions of specific situations and action sequences are elicited, not general opinions.


7. Focused: The interview is focused on particular themes; it is neither strictly structured with standardized questions, nor entirely non–directive.

8. Ambiguity: Interviewee’s statements can sometimes be ambiguous, reflecting contradictions in the world the subject lives.

9. Change: The process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness, and the subject may, in the course of the interview, come to change his/her descriptions and meanings about a theme.

10. Sensitivity: Different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.

11. Interpersonal Situation: The knowledge obtained is produced through the interpersonal interaction in the interview.

12. Positive Experience: A well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his/her life situation. (pp. 29–36)
An acute awareness, at all times, of these 12 aspects of the research interview assisted the researcher in “mining nuggets of data or meaning out of a subject’s pure experience” (Kvale, 1996, p. 3) as the investigator engaged in 8 semi-structured, in-depth, private research interviews. Although the research population was located nationwide, face-to-face interviews, with one exception, were conducted between March and July 2006 in the cities where the participants lived. These one-and-a-half to two-hour interviews were conducted in the homes of six participants. Of the two remaining interviews, one was held in the participant’s office, while the second was carried out via telephone. Although the telephone interview was not the first choice of either the researcher or participant, this type of interview was conducted instead of a face-to-face one because no other alternative was available given the participant’s overcrowded schedule.

The research interview, as set forth by Kvale (1996), is “semi–structured. It is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include suggested questions” (p. 27). The interview guide (Appendix D) used in this study consisted of these seven sections: Reflections on Service as Superintendent, Impact of Race and Gender on Effectiveness as Superintendent, Internal and External Barriers/Challenges Associated with Superintendent Effectiveness, Mentoring/Networking, Support Systems, Exiting, Advice, and Reactions. These African American women had experienced the superintendency; they had stories to tell. The interview questions in each section focused on drawing out their perceptions of their professional and personal superintendent experiences. Probes and spontaneously
introduced subject matter by the participant and the researcher produced additional follow–up questions, resulting in rich information.

Each interview was audio taped by two tape recorders, one digital and one cassette. The researcher transcribed verbatim and confidentially all recorded interviews. Except during transcription of the tapes by the researcher, the tapes, the lists of code names, and any other confidential participant information were secured under lock-and-key in the home of the researcher.

The researcher’s reflective writing of her thoughts and concerns prompted by information received during the taped interview session added rich data to this qualitative study. Therefore, the use of field notes, defined by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) as “the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the [sic] data in a qualitative study” (p. 107), enhanced the taped information. The researcher’s field notes added the missing “impressions and the extra remarks made prior to and after the interview” (p. 107), in addition to the description of the setting and the actions of the participants.

Phase Four: Data Analysis

No one best way exists to analyze data gathered for a qualitative study. The big picture is developed through the use of various techniques selected by the individual researcher, thus producing a “choreographed data analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 16). Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) explained that the process of analyzing and interpreting data depends on three key points, one being the researcher’s questions (p. 1). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) described data analysis as initial codes:
the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that you accumulate to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. (p. 157)

In order to make sense of the information received through the primary data-collection strategy, in-depth research interviews with African American women who had served in the position of superintendent, the researcher used Creswell’s (1998) general procedures in his data-analysis spiral. When integrated with the phenomenological tradition of qualitative research, this spiral offered the researcher the following useable guide to data analysis:

1. Data Management  Create and organize files for data
2. Reading, Memoing Read through text; make marginal notes; form initial codes
3. Describing Describe the meaning of the experience for the researcher
4. Classifying Find and list statements of meaning for individual and group statements into meaningful units
5. Interpreting Develop a textual description, “what happened;” develop a structural description, “how” the phenomenon was experienced; develop an overall description of the experience, the essence.
6. Representing, Visualizing Present the narration of the essence of the experience. (pp. 148–149)

The classifying level of the loop, as Creswell (1998) suggested, “pertains to taking the text or qualitative information apart, looking for categories, themes or
dimensions of information” (p. 144). Thus, at this level the essence of all aspects of the participants’ lived experiences as public school superintendents and as exiters was processed through thematic analysis.

**Thematic Analysis**

Boyatzis (1998) defined thematic analysis as a “way of seeing” (p. 4) or a process that:

1. allows the collection or use of qualitative information in a manner facilitating communication with a broad audience of other scholars or researchers
2. enables scholars to use a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, and organizations. (p. 5)

The researcher encoded qualitative information using themes. A theme, as Boyatzis (1998) explained, is a “pattern found in the information that, at a minimum, describes and organizes possible observations, and, at a maximum, interprets aspects of the phenomenon” (p. 4). The themes were generated through immersion into the information received from participants during the in–depth research interviews that were transcribed, observing the patterns that emerged, and classifying the patterns. Next, the patterns were interpreted in a way that allowed the presentation of insight gained about the researcher’s phenomenon of interest: the voluntary and involuntary departure of African American women from the public school superintendency.

**Credibility**

This researcher aspired to produce credible and confirmable knowledge in an ethical manner. Creswell (1998) suggested that “Multiple perspectives exist regarding the importance of verification in qualitative research, the definition of it, and procedures for establishing it” (p. 197). Lincoln and Guba (1985) concurred, indicating that although
assessing the accuracy of qualitative findings is less straightforward, qualitative research conclusions can be confirmed for accuracy through a variety of means. Adhering to Lincoln and Guba’s alternative terms (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) to establish trustworthiness of the qualitative research, this researcher achieved credibility of the study through the following three techniques:

1. The technique of methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to utilize different data-collection modes, specifically reviewing any pertinent documents (e.g., participants’ vitae, newspaper articles, background information about the school districts, board minutes, memoranda/correspondence in archives of local libraries or the school district, publicly published information regarding the participants’ exits) and interview transcripts. The review of such documents provided the researcher with critical personal and institutional background information about each participant.

2. Deemed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314), member checks were performed as this researcher provided, through informal and formal opportunities, the participants with copies of whole or partial transcripts, findings, and interpretations for accuracy verification. If a participant disagreed with the results, the researcher negotiated until a satisfactory conclusion was reached.

3. To establish confirmability, an external auditor was used. Glesne (1999) defined an external auditor as “an outsider who examines the research process through auditing available notes, journals, schemes.” (p. 32)
For this study, an external auditor with doctoral-level training and qualitative research experience audited selected tapes and transcripts as a means of validating themes and interpretations resulting from findings and the researcher’s objectivity. The external auditor confirmed the accuracy of the categories and themes as found in the sample transcript, the stories, and the digitally recorded interviews. No issues arose.
CHAPTER 4: EXPERIENCES SHAPING THEIR SUPERINTENDENCIES

The first section of this chapter includes a demographic overview of the study’s participants, noting similarities and differences. Using pseudonyms for the anonymity of the participants, in the second section the researcher presents individual stories of the African American women drawn from their in-depth interviews.

Demographic Profile of Participants

Following each interview, limited professional and personal data were collected from the African American women participants using a brief Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix G). Given the minimal number of African American women who have served as public school superintendents and this study’s small sample size, every effort was made to protect the participants’ identities. Therefore, the resulting demographic profile of the 8 African American women is presented in a brief overview.

The age at which these 8 women assumed their first superintendency ranged from 36–51 years, with the average age being 43.3 years. Six or 75% of these women were between 40–47 years of age, whereas 1 (12.5%) was 51; the youngest participant (12.5%) was 36 years of age. The 3 participants who served in a second superintendency, inclusive of the incumbent, were between the ages of 42–53 years of age.

Six participants (75%) had earned their doctorates before assuming their first superintendency. Two (25%) completed their terminal degrees during their first superintendencies. Three (37.5%) held a Ph.D., while 5 (62.5%) possessed an Ed.D. Therefore, all of the women in the present study ultimately held doctorates. The statistical data resulting from the sampled populations of various national studies (Glass, 1992; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007) on the superintendency
revealed overall that “higher percentages of women superintendents held a doctorate degree than their male counterparts” (p. 41). More specific to women superintendents-of-color, Brunner and Grogan (2007) indicated a higher percentage of women-of-color (61%) held doctorates than did White women superintendents (52%).

With 1 (12.5%) exception, the career paths of 7 participants (87.5%) began in the classroom (i.e., as teachers). Their administrative experiences were inclusive of the elementary assistant principalship, where only 1 (12.5%) of the 8 participants held that position, while 2 (25%) had served as elementary principals. Three (37.5%) had worked as a supervisor, while 5 (62.5%) were assistant superintendents and 3 (37.5%) were deputy superintendents. The traditional career path to the superintendency (e.g., teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent [Glass & Franceschini, 2007]) was not the one taken by the majority of the women in the present study.

The school districts in which these African American women served in their first superintendencies ranged from 1 rural (12.5%), to 1 rural/suburban (12.5%), to 3 (37.5%) suburban, to 3 (37.5%) urban, with student populations between 3,500–450,000. Of the two rural and three suburban school districts, one district had a minority-majority student population, as did the three urban districts. According to the participants, the school districts with budgets between $25 million and $1 billion were not perceived to be in financial distress during the time these women held their superintendencies. The districts of the participants who served in two superintendencies were 2 urban (25%) and 1 suburban (12.5%). These three school districts were minority-majority student populated.
Of the 5 African American women who served in only one superintendency, their tenure ranged from 2 years and 4 months to 8 years and 5 months (i.e., 2 years, 4 months; 3 years; 3 years, 6 months; 7 years; and 8 years, 6 months). The estimated mean tenure for women who held only one superintendency was 4 years, 6 months. The tenure of 1 of the 2 participants who was superintendent in two school districts was 7 years in her first superintendency and 4 years in her second, while the other participant served 7 years in her first superintendency and 8 years in her second. The estimated mean tenure of the first for these 2 participants was 7 years, while the estimated mean tenure for the second year was 6 years. Comparatively, the women who served in two superintendencies experienced a longer tenure than those who held only one. Glass and Franceschini (2007) noted 5.5 years as the estimated mean tenure for the sampled population in the most recent national research on the superintendency.

While half (4) of the women indicated they were married during their first superintendency, 3 (37.5%) were divorced, and 1 (12.5%) was single. In their second superintendency, 1 participant (12.5%) was married; 1 (12.5%) was divorced, and 1 (12.5%) was single. Of the participants in the national study of women in the superintendency, Brunner and Grogan (2007) noted that “72% of women-of-color superintendents were married and 76% of white women superintendents were married” (p. 115). According to Glass and Franceschini (2007), 93.87% of the men were married; 6.13% were unmarried, compared to 75.45% married women and 24.55% unmarried women.

Six (75%) of the study’s participants had children, while 2 (25%) indicated that they had no children. Two (33.3%) of the 6 women had one child, while 4 (66.6%) of the
6 women participants had two children. Having children of varying ages at the time they assumed the superintendent position presented no major challenge for these women. For 2 (33.3%) participants, consideration of the position included the provision for the timely movement of their children from one K-12 school district to another. With extraordinary spousal, sibling, and parental support during their superintendencies, these African American women were able to arrange and provide nurturing care for their children. Results from the study conducted by Brunner and Grogan (2007) indicated that more (32%) women-of-color had reared or were reared children as compared to the 23% of White women. Geographically, 6 (75%) of the participants accepted their first superintendent position in cities where they had begun their professional careers, while 2 (25%) of the women assumed the position outside of their home school districts.

Their Lived Experiences

Brunner’s (1999) edited work, *Sacred Dreams: Women and the Superintendency*, and numerous scholars (e.g., Alston, Beekley, Blount, Brunner, Grogan, Jackson, Kamler, Mendez-Morse, Ortiz, Pavan, Shakeshaft, and Tallerico) have presented the results of their research on women and the superintendency. From these studies, according to Brunner (1999), five significant and insightful observations emerged “which can assist women as they traverse the unfamiliar terrain of the superintendency” (p. 3). Particularly noteworthy and relative to this research is the following finding: “the overt recognition that an articulation of the complexities, difficulties, and strengths brought to the superintendency by women of color is critically important to all people” (p. 3).

To provide realistic insider views of life in the superintendency, selected stories from the in-depth interviews of the 8 African American women who have served in the
superintendency will now be presented. The stories reveal aspects of these women’s experiences that defined the intricate and challenging paths of their superintendencies and usually their personal lives. These women navigated their superintendencies with courage, extraordinary strength, determination, resiliency, and strategies to surmount major challenges. In analyzing the lived experiences of these African American women in an effort to understand their professional worlds, these four complex factors emerged: race, race/gender, leadership, and superintendent/school board relationships (including politics and the illegal as well as unethical behavior of school board members). Their stories reveal to women leaders aspiring to the superintendency a very real glimpse into several facets of the most powerful leadership position in a school district.

Dr. Jasmine Cartier

Dr. Cartier shared many different aspects of her superintendency as she described the experiences she lived. Evident in this broader picture of her superintendency was her resolve to confront, grow, and move beyond the opinionated, small-minded people who directed their aggression against her; of those who initially expected her to hold the superintendent reins ever so briefly; and of the man who expected her to cower beneath him and obey his every command. Additionally, Dr. Cartier’s voice illuminated her everyday superintendent experiences as she worked to earn the respect of her staff, her colleagues, and members of unions.

The Death Threat

Four years into her only superintendency, leading a school district with a relatively large number of employees and students (of whom 18% were minorities), Dr. Jasmine Cartier came face-to-face with a parental uprising that resulted in an act of overt
aggression against her: a death threat. As the first woman and African American appointed to the city’s most powerful school leadership position, the incident was not the first negative offense she had experienced. Previously, “The Klan had papered the administrative building when I first became superintendent; I had gotten notes like ‘You got lucky and got the superintendency, but don’t send any more Black teachers up to our school.’” While these occurrences were major aggravations, they were actually minor when compared to the more serious and frightening incident, which she “would never in her life forget” (i.e., the threat against her life).

The unpleasant contretemps initially grew out of the need to move a large group of students from their antiquated school building while a new structure was being constructed. Because of its availability, a within-city middle school located approximately 10 miles and 20 minutes from the outdated school was selected to accommodate the students temporarily. Capable of housing more than 2,000 students, the selected school building had, on previous occasions, accommodated other grade-level students without incident. Because the incoming students would be housed in a separate wing of the building with no need to have contact with the middle-school student population and would have their own gymnasium, cafeteria, and parking lot, Dr. Cartier saw this provisional move as a feasible arrangement. However, the parents of the affected students (the ones to be moved temporarily) vehemently disagreed with her plan:

The community [in which the students to be moved were located] went bonkers, because they said they didn’t want to come in and have their children with all these . . . kids. It was too long of a bus ride. They [the parents] wouldn’t even come see it. They just went bonkers. They had these meetings where they were screaming about me. Then I got the death threats in the letters. The one letter—and where I know gender and race [of the author]—they talked about what they would do to me physically, sexually, in addition to blowing off my head, all kinds
of “nigger bitch” kinds of things. . . . It was really a hate crime, and they gave me police protection. I had to have someone drive me around.

As I looked at the letter and tried to analyze it, one, there were some women hooked up in this letter. . . . This is someone who has seen me. . . . They said they knew where I lived; they’d get my family. . . . They made reference to all that [presentations I had done on my genealogy which told of my great grandfather being born into slavery in a county not too far from here]. I’m not saying that a man wouldn’t have gotten death threats, but I think the fact again—it’s almost like with the county executive—where they feel like they can intimidate a woman and the race piece is that they underestimate us; that we’re going to buckle because we’re not competent.

It [this incident] touched me some place I thought I couldn’t be touched. Sometimes I think we’re in positions, and we get locked into the fact that we, that they see me differently. I’m different. Like I told a board member when he said “I know how you feel.” I said, “No, you don’t because this is brought home. . . .” You know how they say American Express Card? I’m just another nigger with an American Express Card. I’m still a nigger. And I understand that very, very well. And with your silence to this, I told everybody off! Did what I had to do, but I told some people; told my board off; told the politicians off; called them down at the legislature, “Want to see you at 2 o’clock. You show up at the Martin Luther King breakfast every year. You answer anything anybody says about the school system. You haven’t said anything about this.”

I had to really work [italics added] through it. I had to really work through it. I was really angry [italics added]! I’m sure down in that part of the community my name is not real popular! (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

Following investigations by the local police department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, no one was ever charged with the hate crime. Fortunately, Dr. Cartier remained in the position for an additional 4.5 years without experiencing further incidents of this nature.

The Horse Holder

Prior to her tenure as superintendent, the position in the school district where Dr. Cartier served as director of human resources had earned the label of “the revolving-door superintendency.” During a period of 12 years, five school superintendents had come and gone.
On the heels of a report released by personnel in the state superintendent of education’s office threatening a state takeover and amid a flurry of media attention following a huge sex scandal, Dr. Cartier, along with other central office staff members, was called to a Saturday emergency board of education meeting. At that meeting, the sitting superintendent was immediately placed on administrative leave with pay by the members of the board of education. In a move that astonished her and stunned her co-workers, especially the male assistant superintendent who was vying for the newly vacated superintendency, the members of the board of education offered Dr. Cartier the acting superintendent position, thus putting her career on fast forward should she accept. As she pointed out, “A superintendency may have been on the horizon, down the road; but it [this position] appeared in not the normal way.”

Experience in multiple leadership roles from mid-level administrator to executive-level, central office positions in three school districts had provided her with some negotiation finesse, so she quickly took charge of the executive session with the board members. Dr. Cartier immediately asked the eight board members about the board’s voting results related to their offer. Second, she wanted to know the duration of the position offer; third, Dr. Cartier inquired about her placement following the completion of the acting superintendent’s duties.

Her desire to know the voting results clearly upset some of the board members. However, she attached great importance to knowing how many board members supported this unprecedented move to place her in the acting superintendent’s position for a 30-day period; she ultimately found out that the decision was not a unanimous one. “I knew I had five,” she said. “I could have named them to the person.”
When told that she would return to her position as director of human relations, Dr. Cartier replied:

No. That [arrangement] would be entirely unacceptable. I mean you’ve reached *over* [italics added] the assistant superintendents. You would have me running the school system, and they’ll be reporting to me. And then you expect me to go back and report to them? They were absolutely stunned by my response. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

After identifying some additional conditions that had to be satisfied before she could accept their offer, Dr. Cartier suggested that the board members discuss and reflect on her terms while she left the room to consult with her family. She recalled, “They were stunned. As I look back now, I’m stunned myself.” Upon her return to the meeting and following additional deliberations, she informed them of her decision to accept the job under these conditions:

First, I do not want to be barred from being considered for the job if it becomes available. Also, I’d have to be guaranteed at the end of this 30-day period that I would become an assistant superintendent if not deputy superintendent. I’m already doing the job of an assistant superintendent. I’d have to be assured of that. So they went along with that. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

In looking back at her slightly unusual ascension to the superintendency, Dr. Cartier exclaimed:

I knew at that moment whether I was superintendent for 30 days, 30 seconds, or 30 years, I had broken the ceiling! I mean I had just gone through it . . . ! I felt that maybe all those years of thinking, “why did they do this, and why did they do that?” Now, suddenly someone, providence had said, “Now it’s your turn to see what you can do with this.” So ultimately, I no longer saw it [the superintendency] as a temporary kind of thing. Then the person, the superintendent-on-leave, ultimately retired and I saw it as something. I was doing the job, and I thought I was doing it well. I even told the board, “You need to know that I want this job, and I’m going to fight for it.” (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)
Following the process and timeline as mandated by the officials in the state department of education, members of the board of education moved Dr. Cartier from the 30-day acting superintendent’s position to the interim position, where she remained for 11 months. Once the members of the board publicly announced the search for a permanent superintendent, Dr. Cartier recalled that a “groundswell occurred” in that people wanted to know from the board members why they were seeking another person for the superintendent’s position that Dr. Cartier was currently filling. The search was subsequently canceled because of the public outcry. With the superintendent’s search abandoned, why was she selected for the job?

There were a couple of things. One, I had no long history with the school system. The other was that they didn’t think I could do much harm in 30 days [in the acting position]. I think they had no intention whatsoever of my becoming superintendent. “She’s harmless. She’s cleaned up, bright, right, loyal, and thrifty. What damage can she do? We get a twofer: a woman and an African American. How can you beat this?” I think the bar was very low in terms of—you know—they didn’t pick me because they thought, “Oh, she’s superintendent material!” They never thought of that whatsoever. I was supposed to be the horse holder [italics added]. You know that little statue in front of those old plantations? That was supposed to be me. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

*Standing Up to the Bully*

Publicly confronting and dealing with a bully about her district’s proposed budget garnered Dr. Cartier unexpected support from teachers and other constituents at one critical point in her superintendency. She described the circumstances surrounding this particular situation:

There was a man elected county executive, and he had some baggage with him with regard to education . . . . In reality, he was a tremendous bully . . . . It’s always the budget in this county. We’re one of the wealthiest counties in the state. We’re 17th in the school funding. There’s a real disconnect . . . . My initial years I had extremely tight budgets . . . . But then we had some good years there. I mean the governor was saying, “Ooooh, the revenues are great.” The county exec said things were great. The President of the United States said things were great. So I
had lunch with the county exec; and I said, “You need to know this year I’m going to put in a big budget.” It’s not my style to blindside people. I’m going to tell you if I can only call you two seconds before I say it . . . . So he said, “Well, you know, I expected that.”

Had lunch, thinking everything is fine. I’ve told him. So I put in the budget. The next thing I know, he’s blasting me and the school board and said that he is going to hold money for teachers’ salaries until we make the budget like it’s supposed to be. I mean he was outrageous. He came down to a council meeting and blasted the school system. I mean something that was never done . . . . He was attacking me personally . . . . And then he came out and said to the papers that I had allowed the school board to present a big budget in return for their renewing my contract. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

In her speech at an open board meeting, Dr. Cartier responded to the accusations:

You know I can understand being told that I’ve asked for too much money, although I don’t agree. I can even understand not getting the money. But I cannot understand being punished for asking! That is wrong and mean spirited, and somebody has to say so! Wrong Black woman to fool with! It was like whoa! I did what I thought was right. But, I was amazed and thrilled at the support that I rallied. I mean with my teachers. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

Subsequently, members of the board of education and Dr. Cartier met with the county council; not only did a large number of teachers attend, but they gave her a standing ovation when she was called to the podium. Completely taken aback with the show of support, she asked, “Well, what happened?” Overhearing and then responding to her question was a local judge who surmised that the teachers backed her because “they had compared what they knew about her to what they knew about him [the county exec].”

Earning Her Stripes

With Staff.

Dr. Cartier described her staff members as great. “I think for the most part they were loyal—I mean to the degree that anybody is loyal.” Continuing, she noted:

When you’re the boss, there’s a certain amount of, if you will, loyalty because you’re the boss and you have the power. You have the ability to extract
punishment or consequences. But I worked to go another level, in terms of knowing my staff and being supportive of them. Also, if something went wrong, if anything good happened, I gave them the credit. If something bad happened, it was my fault. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

If an issue surfaced and board members wanted to go after a member of her staff, according to Dr. Cartier, she made it quite clear that they needed to deal with her instead. “Take it up with me. If something went wrong in the school system, I am responsible. Once people see and know—if they know they can depend on you—then you can start to depend on them.”

With Colleagues.

With the exception of one or two individuals, the school superintendents within the state initially expressed hostility toward Dr. Cartier. She suggested that the reaction was perhaps due to her assuming the position from a person “who had been around forever.” They were stand-offish, not encouraging. . . . There were some slights and what-have-you’s. But over a period of time people retire, leave, and get to know you better. You earn your stripes. . . . So over time, that all changed. But, the initial reaction was. . . . and you know what committee I was put on? The social committee. I was supposed to be on the social committee. I wasn’t asked, but I was head of the social committee. I mean there were all kinds of slights, but I said I could either stop and spend the time on those minor slights which would distract from. . . . I had bigger things to do, and you just try. . . . You just suck it up and move on. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

After the slights and lack of initial support from her state colleagues, Dr. Cartier decided to rely on a circle of people within the city to help her with her advocacy efforts on behalf of the schools. She said:

I’ll make the police chief my best friend. In the city I’ll do a ride along. I’m going to see all these people because I figure if I can see them face-to-face, “Just give me a couple minutes of your time.” And then, to really start, I was everywhere. But, meeting with people to establish relationships, and also I didn’t meet them
If issues and problems existed with the school system, she asked everyone concerned to call her first. She wanted the first opportunity to address the situation. “Maybe,” she informed her constituents, “I can do something about it. Maybe there’s another piece of information. Maybe there’s nothing I can do about it, and then you are welcome to go on. But, [italics added] please, touch base with me first.”

**With Union Members.**

Because she had been in human resources, Dr. Cartier had established good professional relationships prior to assuming the superintendency and, therefore, felt that those relationships would work to her advantage when dealing with union officials and members. The groups did sometimes meet with her to discuss low morale and the desire for an increase in salaries. However, having stood up to the county executive and being known as one who defended the school system against any and all negativity played important roles in affirming supportive relationships. Members of the teachers’ union learned that she was not one to ignore negative press from them or anyone else.

We had a teacher who was assaulted. Broke up a fight. I was at a conference of state superintendents. Got the call, came back, and went straight to the school. Saw what the situation was there. This teacher had been taken to the hospital. Went to shock trauma, sat with his children, made sure they were all right, came back to the school, went to the football game that night, met the press, what-have-you. But then I hear that the union was telling teachers that this teacher had never heard from me, and I had never been in touch with him. I was known for this. Stopped, right then, got in my car. I went to the headquarters. “Now you need to tell me something. Why are you out there saying that? Because this [reference to her visit to the hospital to check on the teacher] is what happened, and you can check to find out about it.” Now, again, they found that [approach] shocking, because I would confront . . . .

I’m not going to say something happened that wasn’t true, but I was not going to continue the cycle of everybody piling on, beating up out of ignorance. If you
opened your mouth negatively about the school system, then you’d *better* [italics added] know what you’re talking about. So it was with each of these constituencies. I had to prove myself. And, as I said, I think that was based on, on anybody new as school superintendent is going to have to prove him or herself. I just think the added layers of race, gender just piled it on more. I had to work at it. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

**Dr. Lenise Busby**

The lived experiences of Dr. Busby crossed two superintendencies. While the first highlighted dangerous assumptions and unmarked hazards, stories from the second superintendency noted a marked change in her location and the need to adapt to a totally different culture.

*Dangerous Assumptions*

The incident, Dr. Busby exclaimed, “will always *remain in my head* [italics added]!” As superintendent, Dr. Busby had stepped into the top-level school district position initially as acting superintendent from the assistant superintendency. The position of the superintendent had been vacated due to conflict between the members of the board of education and the superintendent. After a couple of months with Dr. Busby in the acting position, a superintendent search was initiated. A few weeks in, the search was abandoned; and the board members asked Dr. Busby to remain as district superintendent.

Young and married with two small children, Dr. Busby assumed her first superintendency in a prestigious school district with a student population of fewer than 10,000. The incident she described began innocently enough, with her agreeing to allow her district’s elementary school students to participate in a research study conducted by faculty member from either the medical school or the school of public health at the local
postsecondary institution, which was “a huge research, very top-rated university.” She and the university professor, interested in pursuing the line of inquiry, both viewed the research as useful for its potential health benefits; the purpose of the research:

Was [to determine] if the age were changing, (i.e., becoming lower) when kids go through puberty because it [age] had some impact on what happens in your elementary schools (e.g., when you teach certain strands of the curriculum; how teachers deal with social/emotional issues [of students]. So there was an educational aspect of it; and it was a health aspect of it as well. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

With a thorough understanding of the research procedures and the design of the study, Dr. Busby sent out parental permission forms with the research surveys for the students to complete. The first indication of a problem was a telephone call from her assistant while she was on-site at a school building. The assistant informed her of the urgent need to return to the office.

I asked why. She replied, “The lid has blown off!” I went back to see what was happening. A couple of parents had gotten incensed that one of the questions on the survey had to do with asking kids in the 5th or 6th grade had they begun, asking the girls had they begun their menstrual cycles and asking the guys, I think, or both of them had they, did they have pubic hair. It was those two questions; that’s why it’s a memorable event. I can remember the questions! Oh, the parents were outraged [italics added]! Now here’s … this is a university community, one of the nationally known medical schools in it also.

It started in that one school. It went to another school, and we had the biggest mess [italics added] by the end of the day on our hands with all of these parents coming. These are well-educated [italics added] parents, coming down to the office.

The press got involved. We pulled the surveys. We weren’t going to do them with any more kids. So it wasn’t that a procedure had been violated. It was the fact that when the parents saw the questions, they became unglued, because they felt that these were intrusive questions. They were questions we should not have been asking kids; they were too young to be asked these kinds of questions. After that, it would not die down. I was the subject of 10 editorials! And the head of the medical school, the head of the public health school—so I had the support from the university, but it just kept going. I think the press saw it as a way for them to
keep some mess going and to keep papers going. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Indeed, the experience was an education not to be forgotten by Dr. Busby. She explained “. . . you can’t assume what a community, what the constituents are like based on some idea that it’s a university community; therefore, all of the folks will believe this way.” For her, “underestimating the conservative nature . . . of a research community” was a “lapse in judgment. I was skittish about any other research projects that didn’t deal straight out with education and about anything to do with health [italics added]!”

Unmarked Hazards

From her position as assistant superintendent for support services, Dr. Busby observed that the superintendency was a very demanding job. She admired the White female superintendent, her predecessor, who had moved through the ranks to become the top-level educational leader of this very prestigious school district. Incidentally, this female superintendent was the mother of a young child and had, during her superintendency, also become a divorcée, which Dr. Busby quickly added was “a hazard people say of taking the position.”

As she reflected on life as assistant superintendent and the realities of her two superintendencies, Dr. Busby noted:

I think you can see a person having to deal with these things, but you don’t really understand what is involved until you’re in the position. There’s the board. There are so many constituency groups that you have to manage in the superintendency, and I’m not sure standing away from the position, even close up as an assistant superintendent, that you can imagine the complexity of it. So the constituency of boards, of parents, then there’s the media, and you’re always in the public eye. It’s demanding on your family because you don’t have—your time becomes other people’s time. So you have to experience those things to understand the impact that they [various constituencies] have on you. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)
Making a Real Difference

After 7 years and still perfectly satisfied in her first superintendency within a suburban school district with a small student population (83% Caucasian/Asian), Dr. Busby was content not seeking a superintendency in another school district. However, a search firm representative urged her to apply for the position in another city. Not being one of those educators who wanted to travel from one district to another “just to say that I’ve been a superintendent in all these districts,” she initially rejected the offer. Using a more personal one-on-one approach, a male African American member of the search firm came to Dr. Busby in a second attempt to persuade her to apply. “You know what?” he suggested:

This city [of the first superintendency] does not need you. [In the new city] there are 100,000 kids like you, look like you; poor kids who need you . . . . That’s where you ought to be. You know you’ve done a lot for this city, but they don’t need you. They don’t need you anymore . . . . You need to make a difference with more kids. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

His words “tugged at my heart” and convinced Dr. Busby to take the steps necessary for application to a second superintendency in an urban school district, a process that was successful.

An extreme opposite of the school district represented by her first superintendency, this urban school district had a student population of more than 100,000 students, 85% of whom were African American. Here, Dr. Busby experienced some of her most poignant leadership moments.

It’s having parents whom you don’t know stop you on the street or in a grocery store or in a church, and tell you how proud they are that you’re the superintendent, and something you’ve done that they feel impacted their child. I think that’s when it was rewarding to me, when it was most humbling—to have parents come up and say, “May I have your autograph so that I can give it to my child?” And I’m thinking that I’m hardly worthy of an autograph. “You know I
feel it’s a service to me. It’s an honor to me to serve you and your children.” (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Relating this exchange with one parent who requested her autograph, Dr. Busby recalled telling the mother, “I’m hardly a celebrity.” She (the mother) said, “Oh, yes, you are.” “I’m really, really not. I’m a servant,” replied Dr. Busby. The mother said, “My son will be so amazed that I have your autograph.” Dr. Busby requested the name of her son and the school he attended and stated that she would visit the school to meet her son in person. At a later date, she kept her promise.

Dr. Busby explained:

I really did it because she expected me—it was such an honor for her that I wanted to do this. So it’s one of those humbling experiences that made a difference. It was the same things in my first superintendency. It was when you could interact with kids and parents, and they thank you for the work that you’re doing. And it’s not thanks that you’re looking for, but you realize that even in the role of the superintendent where you’re removed from the day-to-day operations that somewhere, somebody has seen your touch on what is happening to them personally and educationally. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Adapting to the Culture

The difference between the two superintendencies laid not just in the fact that one school district was suburban with a student population of fewer than 10,000 and that the other one was urban with a student population larger than 100,000. A major difference, Dr. Busby discovered, could be attributed to the dissimilar cultures existing in the two cities. During her first superintendency, she had learned surprisingly that:

You have no private life; everybody knows you. You can’t live where you want to live; you have to live where people expect you to live or they’ll talk about you; people talk about everything including what you wear. They’ll talk about you. You have to adapt to the culture where you are. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)
As she recalled and shared two experiences, she laughed about her reactions at those particular times. The district of her first superintendency was:

... very laid back. It’s very informal; so people call you by your first name. They don’t know you have a doctorate. *Seventy-eight percent of the folks there have a doctorate* [italics added]. So your doctorate is just one more. So who’s going around calling everybody doctor? And you’re casual. You’re going to the grocery store on Saturday. You put on your cut-off jeans and your flip-flops, and you go to the grocery store. You meet doctors, lawyers, and everybody else; and they’re dressed just like you. That’s culture in that city.

I go to the second city, and I go to the mall. I’m seeing these teachers and principals; and they are in pants suits, hats, and jewelry. They’re stopping me because you’re known. You’re on TV so much everybody knows you. So I go home. This was during the summer. My mom was there helping me with my daughter. I said to my mother, “I went to the mall and all these people—they had on these things.” She said to me, “I wondered why you went out looking like you did!” So the culture in City 1 was not the culture in City 2. So I learned just from dressing that I had to buy a whole new Saturday wardrobe... pants suits, no [italics added] hats. From that day on, I truly did wear a whole different wardrobe. There’re cultural things that you do. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Interestingly, the second scenario described by Dr. Busby centered on churches, more specifically on church funerals. “There are 500 Baptist churches in City 2,” she said, “and that’s no exaggeration!” Expectation was that she worshipped at all 500. Such a scenario was, of course, not feasible, “so you go to as many churches as you can. But, you don’t just go and worship as a person would do, as a member of the congregation. When you go, you are still the superintendent there [italics added].” She had been superintendent for only a few weeks in City 2 when she attended the funeral of a little boy who had been killed.

I’m sitting there; and the minister who is doing the eulogy looks up and says, “I see Dr. Busby in the audience. Would you come up and have some words?” I went, “Oh.” So I sat there; and my assistant said, “You’ve got to go. He just called you.” That had never happened to me before that you go to a funeral—you don’t know the folks, and they don’t know you; and you have to get up and say something. *I don’t know what I said to this day* [italics added]. I was so nervous
and taken-aback that evidently I said something that meant a lot to the family because the mother, as I was coming off the pulpit, jumped up and hugged me. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

That experience taught her never to go to a funeral without a speech in her head. Just as important, Dr. Busby realized that

it’s things like that about the culture of a place that you learn; that you adapt to the culture of what’s there and become a part of the people. That’s how they learn to trust you, and that’s how they learn to think of you as one of them. And, it’s sort of that mutual respect that developed. I liked that part of it. I don’t like to be called up, and it did happen at every other funeral that I went to. So I was prepared. I knew psychologically, you go in; you’re the superintendent; you can’t sit in the back of the church. They see you there, and they are so proud. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

For Dr. Busby, experiences such as these were the ones that influenced the positiveness of her superintendencies. These up-close situations in which she became a participant allowed people to see her, personally,

as one of them. If people feel that you respect them, that you care about them, that you’re one of them, you can develop relationships that can impact other aspects of your job as well. When I wanted to go into a community to talk to the parents and the other community leaders about issues around parent support, or instruction, or school change, I didn’t have to build credibility. It was there. If I wanted to put together advisory committees, it was there. . . . So that kind of establishing yourself as one of them allowed you to leverage those relationships, and then to get that kind of constituency support from different groups, from parents, from the community, from the teachers. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Dr. Bella Jacoby

In the reflection of her superintendency, Dr. Bella Jacoby shared her story on the absence of ethics when she described a situation she probably should have reported to the press.
Throughout a wide range of prior administrative experiences, including a 6.5-year superintendency in a smaller urban school district, no challenge with which she had dealt prepared Dr. Jacoby for the two-fold major unethical conflict that plagued her second superintendency. The school district with an annual budget of more than $1 billion consisted of a staff of fewer than 50,000 persons inclusive of a large group of teachers and an even larger student population. Serving in this superintendency under two mayors, one a Caucasian female and the other an African American male, Dr. Jacoby faced the exact same dilemma with both mayors. However, other major issues manifested during the male mayor’s term of office. Reflectively, she recalled that her failure to take action was a major error of judgment.

I think probably the biggest mistake was when the mayor [the African American male], the reform mayor, asked me—sent someone to ask me for $10 million under the table. Of course, I said “No.” I refused to do it, and we had a back-and-forth. Of course, you wouldn’t believe! He was just furious [italics added]! The other mayor [the Caucasian female] did the same thing, but she sent her top person. She didn’t do it so you could trace it to her. He [the male mayor] did it with his top legal adviser. And the man was apologetic. He just kept telling me, “Dr. Jacoby, I know you’re not going to like this; I know you’re not going to like this.” Well, I just couldn’t believe this man [the male mayor] would do this. And then he sent for me himself. He gave me such a bad time [italics added]! Now, I should have gone to the press. That’s what I should have done, exposed him. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Revealing this request to the public, she felt, would damage the reputation of a fellow African American in a powerful position, something she did not want to do.

Therefore, she thought that she could talk him out of his demand.

There was no talking him out of it. He said to me, “Listen, if you don’t know that everybody in the city who holds a position like yours pays the mayor. . . .” I said, “What are we paying you for?” He said, “Oh, it’s not for me. I’m not going to use it personally. I want to be the king maker for this state. And I’m putting all this money—sanitation has paid me; housing has paid me; so-and-so has paid me. I’ll
just put it in this kitty, and then I can be the king maker. Nobody can get elected unless they come by me, and I will have a lot to say about who the president is.” I said, “And on the backs of the children.” I never did reach that man. So we just fussed and fought after that. But, see, I should have exposed him.

I finally did, near the end of my tenure there. I finally said—somebody asked me what my biggest regret was. I said, “Having to deal with mayors who want you to pay them off.” But, see, I should have said that a long time ago. I should have said that earlier; regardless of color, a crook is a crook. He did a lot of things for the city, but he was [italics added] a crook. He was a . . . politician! (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Dr. Jacoby had already found her second school district to be “difficult but not impossible.” She attributed some of that difficulty to politics. “It was harder all the way along because it was so politicized and because the board reported to the mayor. See the board of education was appointed by the mayor of the city. So they were political hacks.” Thus, the mayor’s financial scheme was continuously broached by four board members. “They were going to get a cut.” They told her, “You know he’ll give you a million dollars.” Convinced that she had “aced them out of that money,” Dr. Jacoby found the members of the board “just plain difficult and unpleasant. Oh, they were so mean [italics added].”

As it turns out, the mayor’s $10 million scheme was not the only one that had “Press Release” written on it. While scrutinizing the budget with the city comptroller and others, “burning the midnight oil” in an effort to find money to give the teachers a pay raise, Dr. Jacoby discovered that “there were 47 people working for the district [school] in a category that I’d never seen.” Her questions requesting specific information regarding their jobs in relation to the school district brought an immediate silence to the group. Even after being told that she did not really want to know who the people were, she insisted on having information about the “cast of 47 who each were earning $90,000
to $100,000.” In a private conversation she had with the city comptroller, she was first asked not to make “an issue of those people.” Then, she was informed that (1) he, the comptroller, “was sworn to secrecy” regarding the group’s exact job description; (2) the group had been placed in the school budget by the previous mayor, [a mayor who had been deceased for 12 years]; (3) the 47 people did not exactly [italics added] work for the school board; and (4) at the helm of the group was an appointed leader.

An explosive meeting between Dr. Jacoby and the leader of the “cast of 47” was held, with both parties issuing threats. However, answers to Dr. Jacoby questions revealed the group’s job description, information that, she said, “almost knocked me out of my seat.”

He said that they were gophers. They sometimes have to kill people, but not all the time. They beat up people if they didn’t do certain things. They did the dirty work for the mayor and his people. I tell you when he finished . . . I tried not to let the man see how nervous I was. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

When she gave him a month to find another job for the group members, he angrily responded that she would not be able to carry out that plan.

Immediately after the meeting’s conclusion, she contacted the head of the city council who was an “absolutely, absolutely corrupt person, though very, very rich. But he liked me for some reason.” She gave him the following options:

I can summarily fire them and stop paying them; you can find them jobs; or I can go to the press and let the public tell me what I should do with them. . . . I can’t face the teachers and say we can’t give them a raise when we have these people. . . . (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

After accusing Dr. Jacoby of “playing hard ball,” he extracted a promise from her that she would not go to press if the “cast of 47 was out of there . . . in about a month” and off
the school’s budget. “He got them out of there, and I never said a word to the press. Now that was a shocker! That was a shocker!”

The $10 million was never given to the mayor. Her refusal to become a pawn in the hands of others or to commit illegal acts caused consternation among the board members. The impact of these issues produced a series of stressful discussions . . . even in the executive sessions. The executive sessions were terrible. Getting ready for the board meetings was most unpleasant, because no matter what was on the agenda they were going to be back in that room trying to twist my arm. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

*Dr. Nia Reynolds*

Dr. Reynolds used her own coined term to describe a battle with "politricks."

*“Politricks” 101*

Dr. Nia Reynolds’ goals for the school district in which she had assumed her first superintendency were “to increase test scores, work with community members, and work with teachers.” As superintendent, she focused on the education of students with the philosophy to make teachers happy.

If teachers were happy, then the students were going to get what they needed. I really believe in making the staff comfortable, believing in the mission and why we’re here: to serve the kids . . . that is the ideal of working with staff, working with parents, increasing test scores, helping the pregnant girls, and doing all these things. (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

In her effort to accomplish these specific goals for the suburban school district of 4,000 students, she quickly learned that her superintendency would be much more involved with local “politricks,” (her coined word for politics) than she had expected. For example, she spoke of such issues as:

Which contractors were going to get to do this building; who was going to do the roofing; a sidewalk that starts here and ends there in the middle of the street just
so somebody can get a contract. At one of the schools, there was a single-story building that somebody accidentally put an elevator in, and we had to pay somebody to take out the elevator. Minister so-and-so’s wife needs a job, and she types seven words a minute. And the board members said, “Give it to her.” (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

She readily recalled a particular incident designed to test her moral standards that would have necessitated her participation in unethical and illegal actions. Dr. Reynolds was simply unwilling to become involved in the hiring of this particular human resource director. The board members’ candidate for the position did not have the credentials. He didn’t have an administrator’s endorsement. He didn’t have a degree in education. So how are you going to come in and hire teachers? I cannot do that. At the board meeting when I wouldn’t do it—we had a personnel committee with the board, and they made this recommendation. They wanted this man hired. I wouldn’t do it. So I said, “This is not the recommendation of the superintendent.” One of the board members said, “Okay, then it’s going to be the recommendation of the personnel committee of the board.” Immediately, because the media comes to the board meetings, they knew something was wrong because I didn’t endorse this man. . . . They hired him. But, they didn’t make him human resource director. They made up a position for him, some kind of coordinator or something. They made a position. They got him in. (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

The problem was cause for major concern because of the initial standoff between Dr. Reynolds and the personnel committee.

Dr. Jai Rosewood

The issues of the role and responsibilities of the superintendent versus the role and responsibilities of board of education members often took center stage during Dr. Rosewood’s superintendency.

Who’s the Boss?

What was the impetus behind the dissension among four of the nine members of the board of education and Dr. Jai Rosewood, the superintendent of a suburban school
district populated with fewer than 20,000 students? What caused the conflict (e.g., her style, her race, her gender, or a role conflict)?

A big-level struggle was going on. This kind of struggle over role relationships and the role of the superintendent as being the chief executive officer (CEO) of the organization versus the superintendent as being the employee of the board, and at what point and how did those roles define themselves. Often it was, “She’s supposed to do what we want her to do. She’s supposed to do it our way . . . .” Sort of this micro-managing. “Do this. Organize your staff this way; do this; promote this person; don’t promote.” I do think that was somewhere between race and gender, sort of sorting out those relationships, although I think it’s not exclusively that. I think that [race and gender] amplified it. But, I think those [conflicts] go on all the time. I think it’s sort of the big untold story. I think school districts, particularly with strong boards and strong superintendents, trying to sort out the role relationships between the two, get off track [become more negative]. And that’s all she wrote. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

In an effort to resolve the ongoing differences between the board members and the superintendent, identify the roles and responsibilities of each position, and address dissension among board members, retreats were organized. Dr. Rosewood indicated that a year and a half of her three-and-a-half-year tenure was spent trying to arrange just one meeting to talk about board/superintendent and board/board members’ relationships. Two consultants from the state association of school boards facilitated one retreat; basically, at the end, “They kind of left the room. We were on the gossip circuit for months.” Other efforts “to try to calm the waters down a little bit” were her working with some “very influential leaders in the community” to set up a shadow board, arranging for a conflict management coach, and having educational volunteers conduct planning sessions involving her and the members of the board. She indicated that the volunteers’ response to her was “These people are not wanting to do what needs to be done.”

Dr. Rosewood pointed to two pivotal incidents contributing to the continuing discord.
There was this one big [italics added] personnel issue that came up centering on whether or not I could recommend termination because cabinet-level terminations went to the board. That person, a cabinet member, uniquely had the right to appeal to the board. It was all going to be real public, and they kind of didn’t want to have to deal with it. I think they saw it as being sort of this disaster of a personnel issue. I’m saying we’re going to deal with this issue here. Here’s a way to deal with it, and it’s not going to be pretty for a little while; but we can get to a resolution of it. They were saying just take this person and give him a position doing something else. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

She gave board members three reasons their suggestion was not feasible:

The position was an expensive one. The person just can’t count paper clips. Secondly, you’ve got legal problems with that [action] because that’s constructive dismissal. You know it’s not going to hold up anyway. Third, I’m pushing the principals every single day to deal with difficult teachers. If they have personnel problems with the teachers, they’ve got to evaluate them out. I preach every single day. Now, I’ve got six cabinet members. If I can’t deal with going through changes with one of my cabinet members, they’re not going to deal with their teachers. So I’ve got to do what I’ve been pushing them to do. . . . But that’s how disciplinary issues are, and I can’t move them to the back 40 to avoid problems. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

At one point many attorneys were involved. “We had battling attorneys. We had more attorneys than you can believe trying to sort out this issue.” Seven months after the cabinet member was placed on paid leave and follow-up investigations were conducted by attorneys, members of the school board approved a financial settlement in exchange for the cabinet member’s resignation from the position in addition to an agreement that a lawsuit would not be filed against the district.

The central issue of the second incident revolved around the contracts of cabinet members, the “rewriting of contracts to clean up some huge mistakes” before Dr. Rosewood’s appointment as superintendent. These errors were involved:

inappropriately paying someone who was written in the contract. I had worked with the attorney and had gotten it [the language] all cleaned. We had the administrator sign the contract, and I signed on behalf of the school district. Some of the board didn’t like [italics added] the fact apparently that I had signed on behalf of the school district. Instead of discussing it with me and discussing it
with the attorney to see if that were appropriate, they [school board members] went to the local newspaper and said that I had broken the law by executing these contracts. It was *front page* [italics added] news. Apparently enough of them had met that it was an open meeting act violation that they went to the board and discussed this. Secondly, according to my contract, if they had concerns, they should have come to me first. Thirdly . . . the *News* [staff reporters] were not exactly always the easiest people to get along with. But they checked with the school board association and the school administrators’ association. Despite their headline, both of those said, “No, it’s perfectly normal for her to sign these contracts.” (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

To attribute the cause of this particular conflict between the board members and the superintendent specifically to race, gender, or leadership style was difficult for Dr. Rosewood. “I’m not sure,” she said. “Sometimes, it could have been any male. They could have tried it with males, and it may have gone a slightly different route. I think it all got interplayed together between the male and female thing; the female and the race thing. . . .”

*Dr. Ashia Whiting*

The previous experiences of Dr. Whiting prepared her well. She shared an illustrative story of a well-learned lesson: when to say “no” and when to say “yes.”

*Knowing When to Say “Yes”*

With the outgoing superintendent’s recommendation, Dr. Whiting, deputy superintendent of the school district, had agreed to step into the acting superintendent’s position until such time that a new superintendent could be selected. The president of the board of education had also approached her with an offer of the superintendent’s position. At a young age and having had a variety of experiences at different K–12 educational levels inclusive of the central office, and even some college experience, Dr. Whiting’s response to his offer was, “You guys will eat me up and spit me out; and you know my
career would be shot. No indeed, I would not want to be.” She knew she had good
standing and could maintain the position for 90 days, which she did. “I was a 90-day
wonder,” she exclaimed. A new superintendent had been appointed by the end of her 90
days, an African American woman who asked Dr. Whiting to remain as the deputy
superintendent. She continued in that position until she became uncomfortable with the
style of the new superintendent.

During the following 5 years, Dr. Whiting spoke of her enjoyment in moving
around and soaking up experiences working in urban, suburban, state, and county school
positions. Later, she was approached again and asked to compete for a superintendent’s
position in one of the state’s richest counties. Very much aware of racist board members
in that particular school district, she informed the friend who offered to be her deputy
superintendent that “If I’m going to be superintendent, I want Black people to kick my
butt!”

As another 5 years passed, Dr. Whiting assumed top educational positions outside
the school district arena. A major organizational shift brought an end to an administrative
position she had held for several years. “So I was out of a job. It was painful.”

Out of a job with two children and in the midst of a divorce, she found herself in
the unemployment line. Learning that the superintendency in her home school district had
been vacated, she concluded that “you can always go home again. I decided to apply for
it [the superintendent position] and got it.” This time she accepted the appointment to the
superintendency in the same school district she had not felt adequately experienced to
lead 10 years earlier.
Dr. Iris Melane

Continuous and obvious signs of an African American woman experiencing the “double whammy” were evident to Dr. Iris Melane as she shared her story of feeling strapped down with double standards.

Strapped Down with Double Standards

The president of the board complimented Dr. Melane’s success as interim superintendent, a position she had held for five months following the resignation of the White male superintendent who had left to pursue his political interests. Previously, Dr. Melane had served as assistant superintendent for more than 5 years in this rural school district of 5,000 students. The position of superintendent was one in which she had expressed interest; and board members who were pleased with her work as interim superintendent, canceled a mini-superintendent search, decided to remain in-house, and appointed Dr. Melane.

“I hadn’t been in the superintendency long at all,” she said before she made the observation that “There’s such a thing called quality of life, and this [the superintendency] is not it!” Although an exact dated incident was not shared as to the commencement of her disenchantment, she recalled bringing in a White female as assistant superintendent and then a White male.

There was nothing that either of us [women administrators] could do that was right. Then, I brought in a White male behind both of us who does absolutely nothing. They [board members] know he does nothing. But, because he portrays the image that they want, then he’s okay. It doesn’t matter that he doesn’t work; that he doesn’t come to work. He spends time playing on the computer. I even had the board president walk by his office to see him with his head down on the desk sleeping. Her only comment was, “Oh, he must be tired.” Now had I, had she walked by and seen me with my head down on the desk sleeping, I would have been out of a job. (I. Melane, personal communication, October 7, 2005)
Without doubt, the incident reminded her that the superintendency remains a White male-dominated field. “There were just some men who were not going to have it said that they worked for a woman, and a Black woman on top of that.” Reflectively, she recalled a limitless boundary on similar behavior outside of her district. Once in a meeting with colleagues, she sat at a table with three White male colleagues. Other White men at various intervals approached the table and never even acknowledged her presence. “What I was told,” she stated, was:

They’re upset because you’re taking a position that they feel one of them should have had. You take that, and even as I went through the experience of looking for another job, Black men and women both were channeled into failing districts. I applied in Boomtown. I applied in Black Gold. However, I couldn’t even get an interview in those places; and I had more credentials than the people who were selected, more experience. I was a sitting superintendent. But, no, they channel us [Black women and men] into the Porky Parks, into Slicker Oaks, into Flamingo Townships. This is where you need to be to stay in your place. (I. Melane, personal communication, October 7, 2005)

More than once she heard a board member say specifically to her and to the two Black board members, “‘you people are taking over the district.’ That lets you know right then, what kind of ride you’re going to have [laughs].” Her presence as superintendent at a homecoming parade brought two observations from community members. “The more progressive people look at you and say, ‘Yes; finally, I have a Black superintendent.’ And you see some of the old farmers sitting up there and saying, ‘What the hell are you doing sitting there?’ The ‘attitude,’ you know [laughs].”

Dr. Denise Tarrington

Looking back at her career path, Dr. Tarrington spoke briefly of two issues that could have sidetracked the fulfillment of her professional goals: her youthful appearance and the lack of experience as a building principal.
No Deterrents to Her Success

Whereas racism and sexism surfaced as contentious issues both in the ascent to and during the superintendencies of other participants, Dr. Tarrington surprisingly found that her youthful appearance and not having served in a principalship presented their own unique set of circumstances. She recalled, “At one point in my career, the barrier more than anything else was my age.” Explaining further, she stated that “It wasn’t necessarily my age. It was just that I looked a lot younger than my age.” Also, she indicated that although she was licensed for a principalship, she had never served in that position.

“Always working with school improvement programs, I helped schools get better,” stated Dr. Tarrington. Seemingly, her competence was compared to her age, or, perhaps, the perception that she looked too young to be so knowledgeable in her specialty area. Aware of that attitude, Dr. Tarrington took the “I’ll show you” approach.

The only way that you can prove yourself is that you have to be successful. Once people realize, “She knows what she’s doing;” that my test scores were increased, that my attendance was increased when we (administrators and teachers of a particular school) did what you (Dr. Tarrington) were coming in to help us do, then, it was not an issue. (D. Tarrington, personal communication, August 31, 2006)

In confronting the issues, she explained:

I had to prove to people that I knew something about school improvement despite the fact that I had not been a building principal. The way I did that was to get assigned to the lowest performing school in the district and turn it [achievement scores] around, and it’s been a great school since I did it. Once you turn around one school in need of improvement, the people say, “Oh yes, she took the worst school; she worked with that principal and staff—now they’re the best school in the district.” You never have to prove that to people again. You have to prove to people that . . . . You get credibility by being successful. You don’t get credibility from your title or your degrees. (D. Tarrington, personal communication, August 31, 2006)
Summary

These stories gave voice to a usually silenced group of chief public executives, 8 African American women who have served as superintendent of schools in districts of various types and student population sizes in 6 states for a combined total of more than 49 years. Their voices provided a mere snapshot with a clear focus on the inner nature of their superintendencies in the arenas of intense politics, racial discrimination, gender inequities, unethical requests, and unreasonable expectations.
CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF EMERGENT THEMES

Presented in this chapter are the emergent themes that surfaced as a result of the analysis of the stories (e.g., interviews, contextual cues, professional background, and artifacts) of the 8 participating African American women who served as public school superintendents. Participants served in their superintendencies during a span of more than 20 years, and their work experiences as well as personal situations were similar, yet diverse. As they reflected on and descriptively shared first-hand knowledge of their lives as superintendents, common threads became apparent. The salient themes from four topical areas addressed in the research questions (i.e., exiting, race and gender, leadership, and advice) provided logical organizational segments and will be examined in the following sections.

Exiting

Although not specific to African American women superintendents, Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole’s (1993) research on women’s voluntary and involuntary departure from the superintendency resulted in the classification of exit factors into these two groups: “pushes from the superintendency and pulls toward other options, interests, or concerns” (p. 5). To gain insightful information about the exiting of these successful African American women from their superintendencies, the interview questions included a tapestry of topics. During the analytical phase of the participants’ descriptive responses on their departure or separation, an obvious pattern materialized using the categories identified in Tallerico, Burstyn, and Poole’s (1993) research.
Pulls

The departure of 4 participants (Busby, Tarrington, Whiting, and Cartier) could be categorized as pulls, while the exit of the other four (Melane, Jacoby, Reynolds, and Rosewood) could be classified as pushes. Although the stories from each participant differed, common themes emerged under these two groups. Under the major group of exiting pulls, these four themes clustered: (a) other mountains to climb; (b) doing the things I had come to do; (c) a personal toll; and (d) on my own terms: letting the exit happen.

Other Mountains to Climb

Without exception, all 8 participants had accepted their appointment to the superintendency determined to make a difference in the educational lives of all children. Yet, excluding the one woman (Dr. Tarrington) who continues in her current position but had exited her first superintendency after only 1.5 years of service, 15 years was the longest tenure any of the other 7 participants. Affecting children and their education remained a top priority for all of these African American women as they considered their next professional career move before or after their departure from the superintendency. However, the 4 pulls exiters knew that another superintendency was not the conduit between the children and them.

Into the third contract of her first and only superintendency, Dr. Whiting realized that the weight on her shoulders was her tiredness.

The ideas, while they were still coming, [were] not as fast . . . . You know if you want to do something; I think you do. But for me, it was to do [something] in your 50s. If you get older, nobody’s gambling on you. You’re not marketable. I had a little more in me, other mountains that I wanted to climb. I’d better go while I could. (A. Whiting, personal communication, April 19, 2006)
Dr. Busby, for example, had voluntarily left her first superintendency after 7 years to assume the same position in another school district, where she established an 8-year strategic plan. Having made a personal agreement with herself and an informal, unspoken agreement with the community, she knew she would remain in place at least through the process of implementing the comprehensive 8-year plan.

It was after that plan that I got to the 8th year that I even began to think about the idea of leaving the district. But, I’d also decided that I did not want to be another superintendent. I knew how to turn down all these search folks wanting me to go to this district and that district. I was willing to stay where I was because there was no mandate to leave. I was willing to stay where I was until I found something that I wanted, that I felt was a good match with me. What was lingering in the back of my head was advice from one of my colleagues, an African American woman who had been superintendent years before—“You have to think about the best time to leave. In these urban districts, nobody can stay forever. Usually, you get to stay 1 or 2 years, 2 or 3 years; and you’re out.” She asked me, “Is it as good as it can be?” I said, “Yes, it is.” Then she asked, “Can it get worse? Can it get bad for you?” I said, “Um, um.” She said, “Now it’s time to leave” (laughs). She said, “You want to leave when people want you to stay, and you want to leave when things are on the ‘up.’ If you stay too long, you’ll eventually have to go.” She was so right. I mean that was wisdom on her part. She was wise, and I took it . . . . I knew I wanted to contribute to education in a different kind of way, not really knowing at that time what that way was. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

The goals of Dr. Tarrington’s professional life became even more defined during her only superintendency. Those goals were “to create great schools or learning environments for low-income or working class kids” and “to work for someone who had the capacity to raise the money necessary to make the changes and opportunities happen.” Moreover, the realizations during her superintendency were learning how and where she could be the most effective leader possible. Indeed, she decided that the least stressful and most effective place to reach her goals “wasn’t in the superintendency.”

For her the “issue was not whether you’re working for schools managed by the government or a project that’s nonprofit, if the goal is creating excellent schools for kids,
that’s the issue.” However, having never worked with a for-profit organization, Dr.
Tarrington acknowledged her desire to affiliate with this type of organization where
perhaps the “school design was everything that I had been working for, and the school
was able to raise substantial money.” Ultimately, to accomplish this goal, Dr. Tarrington
needed to climb a new mountain.

*Doing the Things I Had Come to Do*

Dr. Cartier had assumed the position of acting superintendent from her position as
human resource director during a crisis situation in the school district. “I was really
working to settle down a school system that was just hemorrhaging.” Her success at
halting the existing malady was evidenced through her appointment as superintendent.
However, about 3 months into her 9th year:

I decided a couple of things. Again, watching people—I think I’m a student of
people, watching how they behave. One . . . do not stay past your time. I believe
that. And I felt that I had gone as far as I could go. Again, talking about how
organizations work. Yes, they need stable leadership; but at a certain point, that
needs to change. Why? Because if you’re going to get that organization to move
to the next level of discomfort, and I do mean discomfort, you’ve got to move
somebody new in there. Unfortunately, when we’re comfortable, we don’t work
as hard . . . . When you’re a leader who has been in charge a long time, everybody
knows you. They know all your bags of tricks. They know what it means when
you scratch your head. They know all that. So, in terms of what I felt I brought to
that school system, I had done my job. I completed my mission . . . . Other than
feeling like I had completed my mission, there was time for new leadership for
the school system. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

In a similar vein, although not a crisis situation per se, Dr. Busby as assistant
superintendent had also been asked to step in as acting superintendent in the school
district of her first superintendency. “The existing superintendent,” she explained, “came
into some conflict with the board and decided to leave.” Her 7-year tenure in that school
district until she was recruited to another evidenced her success. As she reflected on the
causes creating the desire to depart the second superintendency, she noted that “nothing contentious was going on” that would contribute to an exit.

I wasn’t forced out of any position . . . . It was my own desire of not wanting to do it anymore. You get to the point where you say, “I’ve done this job for 8 years. I think I’ve done the thing I came here to do.” (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

With a slightly different twist, similar views were expressed by both Dr. Tarrington and Dr. Whiting. Not only had Dr. Whiting successfully handled many situations during her 7-year tenure, but she was very forthcoming when she admitted that:

You think you’re solving certain problems. Then about 5 years later, the problem is back (laughs) . . . . A few problems were coming back. And I said, maybe I need to let somebody else try. They didn’t want me to go. I have a knack of leaving before people want me to leave. (A. Whiting, personal communication, April 19, 2006)

In her 2.5-year tenure, Dr. Tarrington remarked that she had done the things board members hired her to do. Those things were, for example:

. . . improving academic performance, reducing the drop-out rate, increasing the number of empowered schools, opening new schools, offering parents more choice, offering new career opportunities for people who in the past may not have had access to career opportunities in the district. (D. Tarrington, personal communication, August 31, 2006)

*Regaining Control of My Life*

Missing from this theme is an abundance of descriptive details and a distinct line of demarcation between participants whose exits can be attributed to pulls and pushes. As a result of this research, the exits of Busby and Whiting from the superintendency were classified as pulls. Approaching their departure from the superintendency, they, in addition to Jacoby, Reynolds, and Rosewood, the pushes exiters, expressed the feeling that the personal toll the position of superintendent took on their lives was overwhelming. For Dr. Busby and Dr. Whiting, the personal toll was, perhaps, a contributing factor in
their voluntary exits. For example, 8 years into the second superintendency, Dr. Busby recognized:

I had tired of the main challenge of it [the superintendency]. It takes a personal toll on you. You’re never home before 11 o’clock at night. You’re always in the public eye. People don’t allow you to have a personal life. You’re on the job all the time. So I knew that that part of it I didn’t want to do any longer. I began to think about opportunities other than being another superintendent. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Furthermore, Dr. Busby revealed that she needed “to gain back some of my own personal time, my life.” She had determined that “I couldn’t give any more.” Continuing with additional insight by relating her response both personally and professionally, she expressed the following view:

You want to do something else. I know what motivates me, what drives me. I’ll give it all when I’m motivated to do it. When it gets to the point where I don’t see the personal payback, then it’s not something that I want to continue. Of course, you continue to get some reward from it. But if it’s going to be that much energy, it has to be a growth experience for you as well. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Dr. Whiting disclosed that, “Sometimes I’d sit in a board meeting and feel like I wanted to scream. I just couldn’t keep the pace.” The position, she explained to the president of the board, “required one to be able to go after it [the superintendency] in full force. I don’t want to be less than what I was.”

For Dr. Jacoby, this realization came throughout both of her superintendencies. As she reflected on the personal toll resulting from the position, she remarked that in her first superintendency, “You just had no privacy as to how far they [the media] would attempt to invade.” The impact was more prevalent during her second superintendency. “You give up your personal life because you just work, work, work. I mean you never finish. You just never have a sense that, okay, we’ve finished this. Just never get that.
You just stop.” Yet, she acknowledged that one of the most fulfilling rewards of such sacrifices was the increased achievement of every school in her district. “All these late nights and early mornings were worth it.” However, the personal consequences resulting from the increased demands from the mayor and certain board members during the 4th and 5th years of her 2nd superintendency were often more intense.

I probably should have left after 4 years and not stayed on a 5th year. I think that would have been wiser because you can only live with a contentious board for so long. I don’t have the disposition to put up with all that nonsense. I probably should have left rather than having to tell the board off at every board meeting. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

During the weeks immediately prior to her exit, Dr. Rosewood experienced a “sense of dread. Oh God, I just dreaded having to deal with these people [members of the board] every day. I mean I loved the buildings. I loved all of it. All that stuff was cool and good and all of that.” This feeling of trepidation centered on “a couple of people [board members],” but such anxiety, she explained, was “not healthy; that’s not healthy.” Careers were being jeopardized for people “who didn’t deserve it and were doing the right thing. It was coming to the point where it [the conflict between her and board members] was getting in the way . . . I had to get out of the way.”

Through Dr. Reynolds’ reflective perception of her exit, she revealed a state of “contradictory” contentment. “I’m glad it [her term as superintendent] ended when it ended. It was stressful the way it [her term as superintendent] ended, but I guess it [the superintendency] can be stressful anyway if you’re not ready to go.” While her sentiments were that “there was so much more I could do for the district and so many people I could help,” she finally decided that “I can’t save America.” Moreover, her expressed opinion was:
I think I left in time because they [the board members and the school district] had a lot of trouble [after her exit] and that would have been attached to my name. I was just pulled out of it and didn’t know why. It was a good thing. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

Before understanding that “illegal money” was the central issue for the negative differences between her and the board members, Dr. Reynolds recalled not readily being able to grasp that reason. “I couldn’t see it like that. I’m good at what I do, and why couldn’t . . . ? That money! Now I understand. I’m glad to be away from that [personal consternation due to the money issue], because I’m not in jail.”

Having been in the position for less than a year, Dr. Melane called a colleague, another African American woman superintendent, and said, “Talk to me about life after the superintendency. I mean, life is not worth it; it’s just not worth it to get beat up on every corner for no reason, for no reason!”

On My Own Terms: Letting the Exit Happen

Five of these former superintendents clearly expressed the view that the decision not to renew their contracts was theirs, as was their choice to exit. Dr. Cartier declared that

. . . no matter how good you are, at some point, it’s [your tenure] going to go bad. At some point you reach the top, and you suddenly start to point down the other way. I don’t care who you are or how great you are. It’s going to start. So when you start peeping over and seeing the other side of the hill, then it’s time for you to make an exit. But, I wanted one that I orchestrated myself. In fact, one of the articles that was written when I announced . . . I had planned it down to the moment. . . . I had timed it down to the moment when I was going to speak. I had asked the board [members] to come; the people that I would make personal phone calls to, to notify; who I’d have other people call on my behalf. And so, the last six months I called the Diva’s farewell tour. . . . I honestly believe that if I had stayed out till the end of my term, they wouldn’t have named any building after me. I would have gotten caught up with budget and this and that. No, I shocked them. . . . No, this was my terms. That’s what the report said in the paper, “She did it on her own terms.” Of course, that’s how I wanted it. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)
The in-depth, personal considerations regarding her departure from the second superintendency were neither based on anything “contentious going on” nor “different” in her relationships with her constituencies. In fact, Dr. Busby described the surprise:

People were *shocked* [italics added]. They were literally floored because I don’t believe in getting up there showboating. I didn’t tell them in advance. . . . I learned from colleagues that it doesn’t pay to tell the board that you’re looking for anything else unless they told you to look (laughs). There’s nothing to be gained, because I wasn’t looking for anything else. People were coming to me. I was deciding whether I wanted to look at their opportunities that they were bringing to me. But, why should I tell the board because nothing interesting may come out of that? So I told them two months before I was leaving. I wanted to make sure that things were in the right order. I would have extended the time if I felt like things were not in the right order. The other thing I think is when you decide to leave, you need to let your exit happen. If you announce your exit a year before you leave—businesses can do that; I don’t think schools can do that because you become a lame duck. People feel that they don’t have to work anymore. Then they start trying to unravel things that have happened so that they can make sure that the new superintendent doesn’t come in and find things in order that they [any opponents] don’t want in order. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

On the one hand, Dr. Tarrington saw her departure and its timing not as issues but as simply being a personal choice.

It was just the last year of your superintendency. You have a contract. You have to make a decision to stay or to leave by a certain time so that the district has the opportunity to hire someone else if you’re not staying. And I made the decision that I wasn’t going to renew my contract. . . . (Dr. Tarrington, personal communication, August 31, 2006)

On the other hand, Dr. Melane was taking notes, going over her contract. She felt that if there were a glitch in it, they [board members] would find it and find some way to get me out of there. . . . I was keeping a log. . . . I felt that’s why I really needed to leave. I didn’t want to go the route of having to sue them or anything for harassment and all this kind of stuff because that really leaves a black mark on you even when you’re not at fault. But I just felt that it was the type of thing where I wanted to leave out on my own terms in a vertical position, rather than in a body bag, which is the way they send out most folks (laughs). (I. Melane, personal communication, October 7, 2005)
For Dr. Whiting, no “line in the sand” was drawn, no major professional
determinant, no buyout, no bonus. She knew the time to leave had come, and she was
voluntarily leaving. From the exiting pushes emerged the themes of fighting an uphill
battle against corrupt, dysfunctional, racist, undermining, and micromanaging boards of
education and of caution involving politics at work.

Fighting an Uphill Battle: Corrupt, Dysfunctional, Racist, Undermining, and
Micromanaging Boards of Education

For 4 of the participants, Melane, Jacoby, Reynolds, and Rosewood, the harsh
realities (e.g., illegal, unethical, and immoral acts; Chapman & Chapman, 1997, p. 209)
of the day-to-day business with members of their boards of education caused internal
upheavals that sometimes led to ongoing unresolved conflicts throughout their tenure. For
example, in addition to her being unable to be effective, Dr. Melane’s opinion was that
hers was a micromanaging board, whose support she did not have and which

tied my hands at every turn. Anything you wanted to do; everything, every
decision you made was second guessed; wanting to be a part of the decision;
wanting to take power from you and use it themselves to run the district. . . .
Those were the types of things when you see that you can’t be effective; then why
are you there? (I. Melane, personal communication, October 7, 2005)

Similarly, Dr. Jacoby reiterated that in her second superintendency she could
neither get along with the mayor nor the majority of the board members after the failure
of their stratagem to obtain money illegally from the school district through her. [The
reference here is to Dr. Jacoby’s refusal to give the mayor $10 million of the school’s
budget under the table.]

If it weren’t enough to have to deal with the mayor and board members’
fraudulent and illegal quest for money from the school district’s budget, Dr. Jacoby was
additionally confronted by 9 of the 11-member board with bogus contracts. They
intimated that “things would be different if you just sign these contracts.” To that she asked:

Why would I sign these bogus contracts? I made copies of all those bogus contracts. Nobody will believe these, Such and Such Paper Company – didn’t exist. Such and Such—people will do anything. It’s really very frightening though because they had made them up; had places for each of the board members to sign, and then for me to sign. I said, ‘Binggggg, this is serious stuff!'” (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Board members were relentless in their effort to persuade Dr. Jacoby to sign the counterfeit contracts. “You can change all this. Just sign. ‘That’s what they would say. At every board meeting, they had these little stupid contracts. I’d be sitting in jail right now.’”

The board members who were not corrupt liked me. . . . [The other members] I didn’t get along with at all. But, they didn’t vote against me. I mean they didn’t turn me down on what I wanted to do. . . . But they were really corrupt. One was a minister! Oh, that made me so mad. “You have just ruined things; just ruined things.” They were serious. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Reflectively, Dr. Jacoby acknowledged that dealing with the non-educational issues became her line in the sand.

Primarily, it was the mayor talking to the board, and the board telling me that “We’re not going to vote on your contract.” You don’t have to. I’m gone [laughs]. They really tried to make it unpleasant. . . . I think the thing that bothered them is that they couldn’t make me change my mind. Until the last day or so they tried to get me to change my mind. . . . I realized later . . . these people had really planned on spending that money. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Tantamount to Dr. Jacoby’s situation was one with which Dr. Reynolds dealt. She revealed “once I wouldn’t sign off on some things . . . wouldn’t put my name on some things,” it [the relationship between her and some board members] started moving toward her knowing that “This isn’t working.”
The issue was an attempt by board members to manipulate Dr. Reynolds into signing bogus construction contracts. In disbelief, she retorted, “I don’t look good in prison orange. I’m not going to hell or jail for anyone.” This problem surfaced, she explained, as

We were doing some construction projects, and they [school board members] wanted to give contracts to people without going to bid. No, which was illegal—and I wouldn’t do it. I wouldn’t take a $20,000 contract and break it down into $5,000, $5,000, $5,000, $5,000 and sign off on it. No, bid it out. You know, stuff like that. I’m not doing that; and then sign it and later it’ll come back and the board would be like, “No, she did it. She’s the superintendent.” It was stuff like that I wouldn’t give them. I wouldn’t hire their friends. . . . You just have to do right and do things legally. . . . I felt that they [board members] were corrupt. (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

Dr. Rosewood acknowledged the ongoing discord between her and certain members of the board of education to the point of their having become “dysfunctional and . . . fighting an uphill battle” on every level. According to Dr. Rosewood, the contentious atmosphere “kind of kept popping up . . . around a particular personnel issue” and moved through other levels to the point where board members tried but were “not making a lot of headway in discrediting me.” She recalled:

The 4 [board members], they didn’t want me. The 5 were like, “Oh, my gosh!” And even some of those were “We just want this to stop.” It was getting to a point where, you know, “Hey, wait a minute, this has got to stop. Everybody, time out!” . . . I think we just got to a point that we just got dysfunctional, and I think everybody had said, “Let’s all just step back” If they can exercise . . . buy out my contract; then do that. Fine. I’m not going to fight back, because it’s not working. This isn’t . . . it’s not coming together. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

Exercising Caution: Politics at Work

Presented by Chapman and Chapman (1997) as one of three “harsh realities” (p. 209) of the superintendency, politics, in some form, topped the list of unexpected lessons experienced by 6 of the 8 African American women while serving in a superintendent’s
position. Specifically, Dr. Tarrington acknowledged her awareness of the politicization of education and the need to be politically savvy. However, her surprise was the “extent to which you needed that [political savvy] isn’t evident until you’re in the middle of political negotiation.” She additionally emphasized that “budget decisions along with political decisions drive a great deal of your ability to have the academic success that you want.”

Notwithstanding the presence of politics in that first superintendency, Dr. Jacoby opined that “each superintendency is political;” she also discovered the enormous force of politics in her second superintendency. “It was so much more political,” she said.

You have to be political without being partisan. You have to understand how to deal with politicians. . . . Dealing with politics is something you just have to learn to do. And it makes the job much harder, because it’s another constituency with whom you have to deal. And you have to deal with them carefully, because they usually hold the purse strings. . . . Anytime you have a large budget, you’re going to be subject to politics. . . . Convincing a politician is very different from convincing citizens who are close to the action. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Being superintendent required considerable skills in political negotiation and politics. “So much politics” was unforeseen, and she had to let them [the various constituencies] know:

I was an educator, not a politician. “Oh, she really is interested in children.” It was just as though they weren’t accustomed to anybody interested in children. I mean that’s the way they acted because everyday you’d have a call from some politician for patronage, or for this, or for that. And I would say, “Just have them apply, and they will be treated fairly.” Oh, they just thought I was from the backwoods or somewhere (laughs). But, I deliberately [italics added] did that. I didn’t want [italics added] to put their people in there. So it was much harder. After the first year and a half—and I got the business people with me, the politicians began to take note. “Oh, oh, she’s serious . . . .” (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)
With no other words of explanation, while Dr. Melane agreed with the other African American women participants on unexpectedly learning “how political things are” in the superintendency. Dr. Reynolds surmised that “this whole thing, the political arena, should not be a part of education; but it is.” To deal with the “politricks,” she pointed out how she “learned to tiptoe in it and around it; and be in it but not of it.”

Admittedly, the one thing Dr. Cartier found surprising came from dealing with politicians. Continuing, she acknowledged that she had always thought that if you were Republican, you only supported Republicans. If you were Democrats, you only supported Democrats. That’s not the way the world works. There’s a whole other network of relationships that you have to be aware of, and so things don’t go straight down party lines. Now even if they appear that way in public, they don’t really, behind the scenes. That was an important piece of information, important for me to learn in terms of working with people—who’s really connected to this one [a politician, whether a member of the Democratic or Republican party] and what their issues are. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

To Dr. Whiting, politics in the superintendency did not appear to have been a surprising element; but she did acknowledge its significance in relationship to the superintendency. She pointed out that “You’ve got to know politics, community affairs. Some people don’t want to say it, but politics is very important.”

Leadership

Armed with a vast array of experiences in public education, these African American women assumed their superintendencies having traveled a variety of career paths. From the local to the national level, their unique, successful experiences in uncharted territory, in special programs and projects, gained them recognition and advanced their careers. Half of the women interviewed had been either the first African
American or the first woman selected for the superintendency in their school districts. In 4 school districts, the interviewees held both distinctions.

Qualities of the Women in the Position

Recognized for her leadership capabilities throughout her professional career, Dr. Jacoby attributed the selection to her first superintendency to several areas that were of keen interest to the search team members who had sought her for this key educational position in their city. Indeed, their city was the same city in which Dr. Jacoby had begun her career, as a teacher, a counselor, and administrator. In addition to wanting an outsider/insider who could bring objectivity, they were looking for someone who had a national reputation and was known to be interested in the development of children’s basic skills; someone who had worked with diverse districts, felt comfortable in varied situations, and was energetic; and someone who had good people skills. Although her experiences prior to assuming that first superintendency were numerous and varied, Dr. Jacoby noted that none had included formal training for the position. However, she felt secure in the fact that her leadership skills were already in place, and she knew how to work with people.

Early in her career, Dr. Busby’s strong performance in other educational positions and her excellent leadership skills attracted the attention of another superintendent who tapped her for positions that moved her from high school counselor to executive assistant to elementary principal. She recalled the mentoring of male administrators who told her, “You’re on the road now . . . all you have to do is continue to perform. Don’t get sidetracked!” These men, she felt, saw something in her. “They wanted me to be a superintendent.”
Evidently, the board members who requested that she step out of the assistant superintendent’s position into the acting superintendent’s position also saw something in her. The outstanding qualities that caused members of the board of education not to pursue their search outside for a district superintendent were described by Dr. Busby herself.

I think one is strong communication skills and, two, the ability to build relationships with people. So I think the people skills were a part of it. I think, thirdly, they were impressed that I had a strong instructional background, knew instruction well. I had served as assistant superintendent for support services which is different. Most women in school systems are in the instructional area, and they all got trapped there so often because people don’t think they know how to handle the management, the organizational aspects of the school system. So having been an assistant superintendent for support services and having to deal with budgets, with construction projects . . . with teacher association issues, personnel, all of those issues. I think the board felt I had a well rounded background to take on the position. City 1 is tough. You have to be able to deal with a very intellectual community. I’m sure foremost in their minds was “Is this a superintendent who can engender the respect of a high, of a very highly intellectual and academic community?” I think the board had to see that as its first priority in its selection of a superintendent. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

As she recalled the interview for the position, Dr. Reynolds felt that in addition to her “ability to take theory and put it with practice, to reach people, and to give a lot of examples, people saw my willingness to want to do something for kids.” Her frankness, candidness, and honesty set her above the other candidates, as did her wealth of knowledge and experience.

Considering that her background was atypical in that her career path included contracted positions as neither teacher nor principal, Dr. Rosewood pointed to her credentials in research and evaluation, administrative management, curriculum, budget and management, logistics, and programmed management as contributing to her appointment as superintendent. In addition to her proven track record in these areas, she
had a “very strong reputation of community engagement. The district was desperately in need of that at the time (i.e., someone who could mend fences with the community, build back community trust).”

Never one “to apply for a position that I didn’t think I had the skills, talents, and experience for which an organization was looking,” Dr. Tarrington was aware of the leadership qualities and areas of experience/expertise the school board members this particular school district would demand of its new superintendent. Her homework before applying indicated that “The school district was looking for someone who had experience with single-gender schools; someone with a strong background in choice programs within a public school setting. My entire career had been built on those programs.”

In her bid for the superintendency of a rural school district, Dr. Melane attributed her success to possessing such qualities as being knowledgeable, competent, skilled, fair, consistent, and personable. Such traits had been exhibited throughout her assistant superintendency in the same school district.

Before taking the helm of her school district, Dr. Whiting had gained years of local, state, and federal administrative experience. She credited her selection simply to having been in and out of the system, fine tuning her leadership skills through various administrative opportunities. She also noted that her competitive nature, and the fact that interviewing was a skill at which she excelled, probably contributed to her successful appointment.

**Effectiveness**

While in the position, each of the 8 African American women who were interviewed saw herself as an effective, if not very or highly effective, superintendent.
Only 1 of the 8 ranked her superintendent effectiveness below 8 on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being the highest number possible. Specifically, Dr. Whiting rated her effectiveness as a 7, because “I wasn’t skillful enough.” However, her confidence showed as she constantly encouraged students and teachers and everybody to evaluate her. She believed that “if the kids weren’t learning under my leadership, I didn’t need to be here.” Dr. Whiting also noted that “10 would be a perfect situation, and it wasn’t perfect.” Admittedly, she explained, “. . . toward the end, I almost grabbed too much power. And I know that you’ve got to assure, let the board know that they’re boss.”

Both Dr. Cartier and Dr. Reynolds ranked themselves an 8. For Dr. Reynolds, the 8 was an indication that “there’s always more to learn; there’s always something that you don’t know.” She believed that her superintendent performance was extremely effective. She intimated, “I think sometimes too effective, and I had to go because I’m a leader and people who worked with me . . . believed in me.” For Dr. Cartier, the ranking of an 8 suggested that she was not secure in her expertise in the area of “the instructional program . . . moving the test scores.” She explained, “My training was not as a curriculum and instruction person. So if I’m looking in terms of tasks for the school system, that’s why I give myself an 8.” Therefore, Dr. Cartier acknowledged areas of strengths and weaknesses. Nevertheless, she asserted:

I believe I was effective. . . . I think I was extremely effective for what the school system needed for that and in that particular period of time. I think organizations need different types of leadership depending on where they are in their life cycle. . . . For that particular time, I was extremely effective. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)
Having served in two superintendencies and feeling confident that she was highly effective in both, Dr. Busby assessed her effectiveness as “somewhere between 8–9, 9–10.” She pointed out:

It’s hard to know what constitutes a 10. If I look at it from the lens that a 10 is perfect, then no. Do I look at it through the lens of having made a significant difference in the school systems and that there were legacies that if you look back or were still there, then I would say, probably somewhere between 9, 8–9. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Listing one of her successes as “being able to build back that trust, to build right on the heels of that [losing a major lawsuit], to build trust sufficiently that we were able to get a bond in a sinking fund,” Dr. Rosewood felt that she was very [italics added] effective in budget management. Also credited to her superintendency was the implementation of a huge elementary literacy program that was really successful, as well as major staff development efforts that were new to the district. The overall feedback she received from her constituencies because of these and other successful ventures led her to rate her superintendent effectiveness between an 8 and a 10.

In spite of having made some mistakes during her superintendency, Dr. Jacoby felt she was a pretty good superintendent and rated her efficacy between a 9 and 10, whereas Dr. Melane saw her performance as a top-notch 10. Dr. Tarrington equated her effectiveness rank of 9 in her superintendency to her successfulness in the areas for which she was hired (e.g., improved student academic achievement, establishing/creating schools of choice and thereby increasing educational opportunities for students).

*Remembering Their Legacies*

No matter the length of their superintendent tenure, each of these African American women was confident that she had left a legacy for which she would be
remembered. On the one hand, some legacies were specific to the school district as a whole, such as with Dr. Cartier wanting to be remembered for “stabilizing the school system, for establishing—giving us some pride back, for establishing some better morale for people, for people to begin to see this county as a contender in terms of school systems.” She felt that she would be remembered well, especially for her hard work with the system.

Dr. Tarrington pointed to improved academic performance, which had been achieved by reducing the drop-out rate, increasing the number of empowered schools, opening new schools, offering parents more choice, and offering new career opportunities for people in the past who may not have had access to career opportunities in the district. Years after her departure from the school system, she indicated that others remember her success in these particular areas, in addition to the fact that she “functioned out of a research-based framework by trying to identify strategies and school reforms that had been proven effective in other districts.” Her strategy of allowing principals to “choose from those successful models rather than trying to start from scratch without building on the success of other innovations in education” continues to be a very positive memory of the educators with whom she worked.

Reflecting on the totality of her superintendency, Dr. Rosewood identified her strength in “leadership, in budgeting systems, in instruction, and in overall working [relationships] with the staff and community” as areas for which she wanted to be remembered. She felt assured that these same areas would sustain her legacy in the school district.
Dr. Reynolds expressed the view that in her former school system she wanted to be remembered as the peacemaker and for bridging the racial divide. More specifically, she said she will probably be remembered for revising the department of human resources and the binder system, a system on which she offered further explanation.

I keep rooms of binders everywhere. That’s how I keep organized. . . . Usually for everybody with whom I come into contact, there’s a binder with your name on it. Whatever papers I gather from you, or whatever we talked about, or whatever I jotted down, I put three holes in it; and I put it in a binder, and I put a date on it. Well, if you see me next year this time, I can open up [the binder] and we pick right up where we left off. People didn’t understand how I did it. I call it the binder system. So I started sharing the binder system. A lot of people would use that. It’s an effective tool because you come in contact with so many people, and you’re doing many different programs. . . . So that’s how I stay organized. Every teacher, like they give you little cards . . . stick a hole in it, and it goes into your binder. So if it’s time for me to do your evaluation, I look at your binder. Principals would come to me. “. . . can I have my binder? I want to know what I did this year. I’m getting ready to do my professional evaluation plan.” It works. (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

On the other hand, the other 4 former women superintendents described areas specific to the children in their school districts. Briefly, Dr. Melane explained her quest to be remembered for having made a difference in the lives of children, as well as having made things better for the district, made things better for the buildings, made things better for the students and staff.

In her first superintendency, Dr. Busby wanted to be remembered for “making education better [italics added] for all kids but particularly for kids who had been underserved or underperforming in the district.” Additionally, she stated:

I want to be remembered for, and I think I am remembered for—that even before test data disaggregating became something you hear about now, we did it to show the ugly side of the story there and to focus the community and the school’s attention that in spite of our huge or our impressive aggregate test scores and other indicators of student performance—under that mass were the faces of many kids who were not served well by that district. And out of that disaggregating of data and revealing that we were two schools in one, a highly suburban, high-
achieving school but a small urban school that wasn’t serving kids well, that we focused attention, made sure that those kids were also getting an excellent education. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

Further explanation revealed that even though she served her first superintendency in a very, very high achieving district, a bimodal population existed that was composed of African American children who were “the poorer achieving kids, kids from poor economic backgrounds.”

Dr. Busby served her second superintendency in a large urban district where the majority of the kids came from poor economic backgrounds. She recalled that local citizens sensed “mediocrity was okay as long as they could do minimum work and be prepared for minimum jobs, menial jobs.” Going into that superintendency she asserted:

There is nothing. There is no difference in the brains and the aspirations of the kids in City 1 (the city of her first superintendency), all the high achieving kids in City 1 and all the kids in City 2. And, therefore, we were going to educate all of these kids, to provide them the same opportunities to graduate, to go to college, to pursue meaningful careers, and to make that the purpose of the district. And that elevated the whole mission and the whole expectations of the district. So those are two legacies I think that I left in both of those districts. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

In addition to being remembered in her first superintendency for showing her constituents that “African American students’ performance was being masked by the aggregate,” Dr. Busby pointed out that hers was one of the first districts to create very meaningful school-based committees for decision-making. Equally special and impressive to Dr. Busby were the continued comments she received from educators regarding the amount of professional support and professional development for the school leaders and for the teachers she provided in her second school district.

With her focus on students during her superintendency, Dr. Whiting determined that she set precedence for student programs for which she wanted to be remembered. In
addition to increasing the number of children graduating and increasing the number going to college as well as getting financial aid, she tirelessly worked with staff members in the city employment department. Her objective was to celebrate all of the students. The one special program was

for every kid who graduated and wasn’t going to college. I worked with him or her to make sure he or she had a job. I haven’t seen anybody else do that and that’s what you should get from schools. Somehow we managed to get everybody a job. (A. Whiting, personal communication, April 19, 2006)

Commenting on how she would be remembered, Dr. Whiting acknowledged that a lot of people would believe that her superintendency was a successful tenure. Because she liked international travel so much, she “designed and set up situations for teachers and administrators to go, be rewarded for things by giving foreign trips for visits. I had to put together international travel for kids; had kids going to England, to Egypt.” She recalled obtaining money from a foundation she used “to create pre-engineering programs within schools, banking and finance within [schools], health careers.”

In her two superintendencies, Dr. Jacoby desired to be remembered for “significantly improving the quality of education particularly for poor and disadvantaged children who members of the public think usually can’t perform well.” Additionally, along with numerous other deeds (e.g., creating a program to bring well-known scholars and artists into the schools followed by a student-oriented production with a format similar to a well-known nationally televised news program), she felt that “energizing teachers, providing professional development for them so they could do their jobs, and giving people who were really good an opportunity to move up the ladder” were actions that should etch her superintendencies in memories.
Of immense significance to her was “Trying to re-professionalize education and teaching, because I think somewhere along the line we lost sight of the importance of teaching. I tried to make it into what I believe it is: a noble profession.” Dr. Jacoby commented on her perceived fairness and the increased numbers of women in principalships in her school districts as the hallmarks of her superintendencies and, thus, the issues for which she was most likely to be remembered.

*Their Passion for the Position: Motivation behind the Ascent*

While their paths to the superintendency were different, Rosewood, Cartier, and Busby described very similar reasons for their enjoyment of the position. For example, Dr. Rosewood explained that her passion for the job emanated from “a lot of the decision making and pushing toward systemic change, and sort of being that bridge between seeing and having that systemic vision, and then moving the whole system toward that.” Similarly, Dr. Cartier thrived on being able “to make decisions. I could really make [italics added] decisions. . . . I enjoyed the strategy making. I enjoyed making things work.”

Notwithstanding, she was aware that her decision making always involved different constituencies and the school board. Although the decisions were ultimately hers, “talented people around me” made the leadership experience fun. With these people she sought creative solutions to problems, offering them a weekly opportunity to voice their opinions and present recommendations. In fact, she stated, “. . . I’m very much one—please be smarter than me. I don’t want somebody who’s going to say, “Okay Boss, whatever you say.”
Not only did Dr. Rosewood emphasize the importance of her role as a link between the schools and community and other kinds of support systems in the community, but she thoroughly enjoyed the work. She stated, “I thought it was really great being that person . . . . You’re sort of the one who . . . takes the education message out to the chambers and the city council. . . . But, then you’re also giving their views back into the system.”

Providing Dr. Busby with great fulfillment was “the opportunity to be in a position where you could make strategic decisions that impact the lives of kids.” In addition to having “a lot more authority to make decisions about policy, and budgets, and resource allocations,” being in the superintendency also afforded her “the opportunity to establish a vision and be able to work with others to embrace the vision and then to carry it out.” She described her work with different constituent groups as intriguing as she worked “at bringing people around the table and talking about issues that are important to them and having them to feel that they were a part of the solution and not always part of the problems.”

For Dr. Jacoby, the enjoyment of the superintendency came through “being in the position to influence the education of lots of children.” After leaving the classroom as a teacher, Dr. Jacoby recalled how very much she missed the children and how others convinced her that she could help more children by being in another leadership position. Later in her career, she realized “when you make good policy, you’re affecting a lot of kids.” Therefore, the most satisfying aspect of her position was “being able to influence and ensure that the kids got a better education than they were getting,” before she became superintendent.
While Dr. Melane reveled in “the [italics added] interaction with the children, doing things that will benefit them and seeing the results of the work you do,” Dr. Whiting relished her superintendent experiences in “working with people and helping them become better.” The end results of her assisting her administrative team were to help children. From a superintendent’s perspective, she offered this explanation.

You’re not directly responsible for the children, and you’ve got to get in your head “What do I do to make it possible for the people who work for me to do whatever they [italics added] need to do so that the children get the best program possible?” . . . Tell me, did you get the books there on time? Did you develop the curriculum materials? Did you hold the professional development meetings? Were there people working on things that they needed as well as what the system needed? You’ve got to develop those strategies so you can see that line all the way down to children. But, you’re not directly doing it. (I. Melane, personal communication, October 7, 2005)

Additionally, she saw the superintendency as a “wonderful opportunity to work, not just for the kids, but for the total community.”

For Dr. Tarrington, the superintendency was most gratifying because of “working with innovative, committed educators; helping parents get the education that they wanted; offering more choices for students; and improving the academic performance of young people.” Dr. Reynolds enjoyed opportunities that allowed her “the ability to reach across the district to everybody—the ability to help teachers, parents, the church community, [and] businesses . . .”

Race and Gender

I had been an assistant, a first assistant superintendent of color, first female, a deputy superintendent female of color. So it [the superintendency] wasn’t my first first [italics added]. I had already spent several years being the only one in the room. And I live – I think part of my not having so much sensitivity with that [race and gender] is that I grew up in a segregated situation. When I went to college, I was the one in college. I’ve lived my life being the only—I’ve lived a large portion of my life being the first and the only one in room. So the
superintendency just wasn’t the first time that I’d had to learn how to deal with that. (D. Tarrington, personal communication, August 31, 2006)

Being the first and/or only one in varied local and national educational positions before the superintendency was also acknowledged by Jacoby, Whiting, and Rosewood. However, having previously dealt with issues of race and gender biases did not alter the course of these issues becoming challenges, major or minor, during their superintendencies.

The Blurry Line between Race and Gender

Referred to by some researchers (Beal, 1970; Doughty, 1977; Lerner, 1973) as the double bind, double whammy, double-dutch, and double jeopardy, the dual discrimination of racism and sexism, the two “isms,” often carried no clear-cut, definable line for Busby, Melane, Jacoby, Whiting, Rosewood, and Cartier. Admittedly, Dr. Whiting saw the issue as “cloudy sometimes as a woman. What is it? Why is it that they are keeping me out of here?” The differentiation is not always clearly seen, according to Dr. Busby, who stated:

It’s hard to know which in some instances—what’s going on; whether people are reacting to you because you’re female and you’re in a male-dominated profession, or whether it’s racism. It’s probably indistinguishable in some instances. Sometimes you can pretty much figure out it might be race. Other times, many times, people who are racist are also sexist. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

A comparable observation was made by Dr. Cartier who suggested that the “isms” function as a team with sometimes one of the other pulling out in front. In the situation of the death threat she received during her superintendency, she felt that both racism and sexism were operative. She explained:
When people are mad at you, I think it accentuates anything they see as a deficit about you. . . . If I weren’t doing something for one, it accentuated that I was Black and a woman. I think race particularly was really galling and aggravating. That was really galling. I think the gender piece just kicked in as a kind of thing you think you can do to scare me.

. . . I’m not saying that a man wouldn’t have gotten death threats, but I think . . . it’s where they feel like they can intimidate a woman, and the race piece is that they underestimate us, that we’re going to buckle because we’re not competent. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

Other incidents came to mind as Dr. Cartier reflected on the sometimes indistinct line between race and gender. She mentioned how, at the very beginning of her superintendency

there was a certain stunned—well I even think, again this is where I think race and sex, gender—in this case I even think the two together, that the whole county was stunned. I mean anyone who came in contact with me was stunned. They just didn’t expect anyone with any degree of competency to be doing this [handling the duties and responsibilities of a superintendent]. Just stunned! (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

When she recalled the “stand-offish, un-encouraging” manner and anger expressed toward her early on from colleagues around the state, Dr. Cartier was unsure of whether their behavior was due to the fact that her predecessor was a “long-time good old boy” or because she was an African American woman. “They may have acted this way toward anyone. I don’t know whether they would have done it toward another White man.”

Additionally, Dr. Cartier expressed the feeling that her race, as well as her gender, caused her board members “always to underestimate what I could do.” However, she pointed out that “my strength was being underestimated consistently, again and again.” Similarly, in her situation, Dr. Melane felt very strongly that the “isms” ran “neck-and-neck. They were both up there together; both played an equal part.”
According to Dr. Rosewood, the culture of the city influenced the prominence of racism over sexism or vice-versa, or whether or not the two issues were indistinguishable. Given the conservative community in which she had served as superintendent, she found that racism and sexism were unspoken secrets and hard for people to figure out. Although the city in which she was located as deputy superintendent was clearly a White majority, the African American presence was large. She had sensed a difference between the two districts, specifically in her comfort levels. Furthermore, she pointed out:

You just know all those issues are out there. It becomes sort of a wallpaper. There’re issues of race. There’re issues of gender. There’re issues of leadership style, whether you’re inclusive or not. There’re issues of insider versus outsider. It’s all sort of part of doing business. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

Stating that “they [race and gender] both are viewed with less than complete respect,” Dr. Jacoby also expressed her belief that “Race in America carries a stronger stigma than gender. There’re always exceptions to that.” When asked to comment further, she explained:

When they see a Black face—and that Black face means something in this country [italics added], it really conjures up in people’s minds all of their stereotypes—Their worst stereotypes about what you [italics added] must be like as a Black person. They discriminate against women, but in a way—they defer to say women as if women have less ability or something like that. But, it’s not that stark kind of hatred that you see. I have met people—you look at them and know that they dislike you. You haven’t said a word. They haven’t said a word, but just because you are Black. More than once I’ve been asked, “How did you get this [superintendent position]?” …What they’re really talking about is how a Black person got this [position]. Now, I have never [italics added] been asked that by a Black person or even a Latino person. I have always been asked by White men and women [italics added], but mostly men. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

At a board of education meeting during her second superintendency, she recalled an incident where a man stood and verbalized his dissatisfaction with her as
superintendent. “You’ve got this woman up here. You know no woman can lead a district like this. Besides that, she’s a Black [italics added] woman. She hasn’t had the experience necessary to lead this district.” Regardless of the fact that two or more board members admonished this man, Dr. Jacoby considered the man’s comments quite insulting. Nevertheless, she used one of the lessons she learned during her superintendences, “You don’t personalize it, even when it’s personal.”

Nonetheless, Dr. Jacoby found it extremely irritating that members of the press would describe what she wore. “She had on a beautiful blue suit. She was wearing such-and-such.” Admittedly, that sort of coverage from both women and men reporters evoked a strong feeling of frustration.

I don’t know if that were because I was a Black woman or just a woman. I find it hard to believe that they would have done a White woman like that. Maybe they would have. I was just amazed [italics added]! (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

In experiencing race and gender ambiguity during their superintendences, the common thread of having to prove oneself or eliminate the skepticism of others emerged from the reflections of Melane, Jacoby, Cartier, and Rosewood. For instance, for Dr. Rosewood the distinctness was sometimes unclear:

I think I always had to prove something and all of that. . . . I don’t know if it were mostly race or mostly gender or what that required I prove something. “Is she going to be, a kind of administrator they want?” and particularly that had to do more with style I think. Was I going to just tell them what to do basically [italics added]? Just tell them what to do [italics added]. . . . So it’s some of that kind of thing that you know you sort of had to continue proving it but in a lot of circles. (J. Rosewood, personal communication, March 6, 2006)

Dr. Cartier sensed that the teachers in her district “carried some of the same concern about me that any group carries. ‘She’s a woman. She’s a Black woman. She hasn’t been a superintendent before.’ So I had to prove myself.” In fact, Dr. Cartier felt
that “I had to earn my stripes with every constituency . . . I’m sure there were people who had concerns about me based on race, gender, and experience. And I had to prove myself.”

While Dr. Melane determined that “a lot of times, the questioning of why you’re doing stuff and having to substantiate all this kind of stuff” was something she knew, “other people before you didn’t have to do; didn’t have to go through that.” The skepticism/apprehension of others, specifically her staff, of Dr. Jacoby, was seen through their expectations of her being unfair to Whites. I would be partial to Blacks; that men wouldn’t have a chance. They just had all kinds of notions about what would happen. But interestingly enough, after we got started, they began to be surprised. You’d hear little whispers about it. “She appointed so-and-so. Can you believe that?” I think they came to respect me, but they didn’t start out that way. They were very—but even the Black people didn’t start out that way [accepting]. . . . In the end, they really came around well. (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

Race: An Asset, a Liability, and “Their Problem”

Being an African American was a negative-positive issue for 6 of the 8 women participants. While 3 of the participants (Busby, Reynolds, and Rosewood) saw their race as an asset in their superintendencies, Cartier, Melane, and Jacoby opined that race had often placed them at a disadvantage.

On the one hand, especially in her second superintendency, Dr. Busby believed that “people saw me as one of them. If people feel that you respect them, that you care about them, that you’re one of them, you can develop relationships that can impact the other aspects of your job as well.” Having to go into a community to talk with parents and community leaders about issues centering on parental support, instruction, or school changes, she recalled not having
to build credibility. . . . I’ve heard people say, “She’s one of us. She’s got kids in school, too.” I’d tell the story about my kids, my son. . . . Tell them true stories; and they would come up and say, “Well, she’s a mom. . . .” That kind of establishing yourself as one of them allowed you to leverage those relationships to get that kind of constituency support from different groups, from parents, from the community, from the teachers . . . looking like them allowed relationships to be built that I’m not sure you could get the same level…if I were not an African American woman, especially in City 2, in a predominantly African American community. (L. Busby, personal communication, April 13, 2006)

On the other hand, Dr. Busby opined, “I’m sure race and gender came into play in my superintendency with colleagues or with the board. Race is always the elephant in the room, but the elephant is not always seen.”

Although Dr. Reynolds acknowledged the importance of race, she stated that “I try not to think in terms of color.” However, she also revealed feeling that her race contributed to the very effective manner in which she dealt with her “parent and community populations. I was out there, and I was able to identify with my parents, my community, and my teenagers.” She believed that part of her ability to deal with the White community came from this fact:

I was able to be myself, who I am, talk about my Blackness, bring it out. Talk about the fact that I’m Black, and you’re White but that doesn’t matter. True to whom I am. Respect you for whom you are; but know who I am. (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

Although Dr. Rosewood followed an African American male superintendent, she indicated that “there were a lot of undercurrent racial issues, achievement gap and all that stuff.” But, she also felt that “there was a little bit of some opportunity there by me being an African American.”

In her reflection of race and its impact on her superintendency, Dr. Cartier decidedly believed:
It [race] influenced [my superintendent effectiveness], because I think that anyone in this role who’s Black and a woman carries an extra weight on her shoulders. They just do. I mean it may be transparent to the people who come in contact with you everyday, but it’s something that’s there for you every minute of everyday. . . . It goes back to DuBois’ work when he talks about the duality of our existence. You’re always wondering, “Are they reacting this way to me because I’m Black or White, or what did they mean? Let me double think my response.” Now maybe that’s not a bad thing in the sense that it causes you to really examine them [responses]. But, it is [italics added] a pressure. It is a pressure that’s there for you all the time. It’s the same as the pressure that any African American has that I think Whites do not understand. . . . We come with the burden of expecting [italics added] the possibility of rejection. . . . That’s only magnified when you’re in a position of power and all groups have unrealistic expectations of you. They all have unrealistic expectations. So it’s a tremendous pressure. I didn’t find it crippling. I just found it there always. And again, that there were not people to talk about it because White folks or my staff or what-have-you just have no understanding of it whatsoever. (J. Cartier, personal communication, March 17, 2006)

Furthermore, she recalled that on the evening following her historic appointment to the position of acting superintendent, a White board member said to her “Jasmine, isn’t this wonderful? You know they call this a racist school system because we’ve never have even an assistant African American superintendent. So you’ll be in the history books, and they won’t be able to say that anymore.” The comment was one to which she merely uttered, “ummm, huh [yes].”

Not only did Dr. Melane affirm that in her first superintendency, “Race hindered me greatly,” but she knew that “it [race] played a major, major [italics added] part in a lot of the setbacks that I had.” Similarly because of her race, Dr. Jacoby spoke of “being treated differently; being judged by a different set of standards by both the press and the public; having more expected of you.” She pointed out that “You’re not playing by the same rules. If you make a mistake, it’s magnified.” However, through the racial muck of her second superintendency, Dr. Jacoby recalled the pride expressed by African American teachers and administrative staff members:
I think being an African American woman, just being an African American, gave them [teachers and administrative members] such a sense of pride because there were a million Black people in City 2; and they had never had a Black superintendent. . . . It was sort of like they were saying to the people . . . “Don’t you go too far with her.” It was that sense that you felt all the time. It’s like having a guardian angel. It’s the first time race has been that much of an advantage. . . . (B. Jacoby, personal communication, March 22, 2006)

On a more personal level, the lens through which Dr. Jacoby viewed the issue of race suggested, as it did for Dr. Whiting, that race was “their problem.”

. . . The fact that I am Black is not my problem. I’m very proud to be Black; but if you have a problem about somebody being Black, you have [italics added] a problem. If you are concerned because I’m female, then you have a problem about women. But it’s not my problem. I would just say it very openly. These people were so startled by that. . . . I don’t feel any less than anybody because I am Black and female. (A. Whiting, personal communication, April 19, 2006)

In a similar vein, Dr. Whiting stressed her comfort with the person she is and candidly elucidated her feelings on the race issue.

Well, let me tell you the truth. I know that I’m African American. I know that I’m a woman, and that will never change. So I’ve always let that be somebody else’s problem. I’ve served on a lot of boards where I’m the only woman, the only Black. It’s just not my problem. I can’t do a thing about it! So, I go right in there on them. That is it! If you don’t let folks intimidate you, because you’re often projecting “I know they’re thinking this.” [I] don’t have time for it. You build friendships. You build relationships. . . . (A. Whiting, personal communication, April 19, 2006)

Dealing with Gender Bias

Without doubt, Dr. Rosewood concluded that gender was sometimes an issue when she dealt with White males who “came up through sort of the administrative management” world or “who saw themselves as that. Is she going to be tough enough? Is she going to tell them what to do?”

Generally, at the teacher, principal, and administrative levels, she ascertained a major degree of acceptance as “they kind of took it [her gender] as is.” Admittedly,
however, she recalled the different behavior exhibited by two of her staff members, one male and one female. Certain inappropriateness on the part of the male caused her to step up and remind him of the fact that “I am superintendent; this is not going to happen.” This male, “used to being in male environments,” was later written up and eventually dismissed. “I think it [the male employee’s behavior],” she stated “was a little bit of the kind of pushback he would never have given to a male.” From the female staff member, “I got . . . sort of this sense that she either wanted to be a friend and given a whole lot of recognition for that or [for] race.” Although Dr. Rosewood understood the female employee’s relationship with the previous male superintendent, she maintained that there were “things she [female employee] never would have done” had Dr. Rosewood been a male. “She would have asked him a hundred times, ‘Can I do this? Should I do this?’ That just seems like that may have had a little to do with gender.”

While Dr. Rosewood acknowledged that the actions might have been taken with a male superintendent in regard to one particular incident between her and a board sub-committee, she sensed gender bias. “They may have gone a slightly different route,” she stated, “had I been a male.” She explained that this sub-committee had basically given how they wanted me to reorganize my staff; who to pull off; who not [italics added]; who to give more responsibilities; who not [italics added]. I’m saying, “No, I cannot do that. It doesn’t follow their evaluations. This isn’t the way I want this organized—the way I work.” (J. Rosewood, March 6, personal communication, 2006)

Initially, with other superintendents in her state, Dr. Cartier had observed that the gender issue was big. An incident occurring at one of the state superintendents’ meeting involved an unforgettable remark made during a personal exchange between her and another superintendent. Considered “one of the boys” because she played poker with
them, the only other female superintendent in the state came to her and said, “Maybe you need to get a lawyer.” With this unexpected and inexplicable remark, Dr. Cartier surmised that this other female superintendent was “just not in any way [italics added] supportive.”

Two participants, Drs. Reynolds and Whiting, noted Black-on-Black gender bias among colleagues. Dr. Reynolds spoke first of the “good-old-boy network in the Black community among the Black men.” She alluded to the noticeable existence of this situation when she spoke first of interviewing for principal positions. “All the good-looking men were getting the jobs if they had a 75 [an administrative certification]. It had nothing to do with testing. . . . They were just stepping over me simply, I felt, because I was a woman.” However, the principalship was obtained as was the superintendent position. Clearly, she noted

sexism. I know it does exist because in our African American superintendents’ group, there have been positions that have come up . . . and they kind of pass it around to the men first and tell them. If the men don’t get it; then they’ll tell you [the women] about it. So it [sexism] does exist in our community, in our race too among the guys. I don’t know if they feel they should get it, or they feel they have families to take care of. I don’t know what it is. They take care of each other, first! First [italics added]! (N. Reynolds, personal communication, June 14, 2006)

Similarly, in reflecting on her experiences, Dr. Whiting made this comment on the issue of Black-on-Black sexism.

Sometimes African American male superintendents have not treated African American women superintendents with the respect that we deserve. They’ll often say, “you’re a good—you’re about the best woman superintendent we know.” What do you mean? We’re not good enough. What do you mean? During dinner time [at conferences] when I was superintendent, the men would never invite the women…. (A. Whiting, personal communication, April 19, 2006)

A positive regarding gender exuded from the reflections of Drs. Tarrington and Whiting. Although Dr. Whiting acknowledged and described an issue regarding the ill
treatment by some of her African American male colleagues, she indicated that “I did very well managing men. You don’t embarrass them publicly. If you’ve got something you’ve got to deal with, you deal with it one-on-one. Don’t play the female games on them.” However, she recalled an incident prior to assuming the superintendency where she had become deputy superintendent and a former African American male principal had become her subordinate. “He attacked me ferociously in a meeting. I believe his tactic was to make me cry. And so I’ve always told women, ‘Do not ever let them [men] see you cry.’”

Dr. Tarrington expressed the view that in her superintendency, being female and African American “obviously helped me.”

I think it was very obvious that the female leaders in the district were pleased to have the first female superintendent and worked really hard to make sure that they contributed to the success of my administration. But, then I don’t mean that it was only the female principals but that’s just for many people who had the first female superintendent. Many people rallied around me and supported me, because I was a first and wanted me to be successful. (D. Tarrington, personal communication, August 31, 2006)

Advice and Strategies

Two key areas of this research effort were the (1) advice for African American women aspiring to the superintendency and (2) identification of strategies for the retention of African American women superintendents. From the participants, these three common categories of advice and strategies emerged: personal development, academic preparation/professional development, and board of education responsibilities. (See Figure 2.) They also highlighted the importance of societal changes in a number of critical areas, including the willingness of citizens to give African American women the opportunity to serve as public school superintendents, the readiness to refrain from
Black-on-Black discrimination toward African American women, and the motivation to improve the condition of public education. (See Figure 3.) Recommendations for African American women aspiring to the superintendency are presented in the areas of personal development, board of education responsibilities, and academic preparation. (See Figures 4, 5, and 6.) Finally, they mentioned personal development strategies (See Figure 7.) and ideas that board of education members could consider in retaining African American women in the CEO position. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 2. Key Categories of Recommendations from Former African American Women Superintendents
Figure 3. Societal Changes in Critical Areas

Willingness of
- society to allow females to enter this position; to give African American women the opportunity
- African American male superintendents to refrain from participating in “black-on-black” gender bias toward African American women superintendents
- condition of public education

Paradigm Shift
Figure 4. Aspiration to the Superintendency: Personal Development
**Figure 5.** Aspiration to and Retention in the Superintendency: Academic Preparation/Professional Development
BOARD OF EDUCATION RESPONSIBILITIES

- Ensure that African American women are included in the district’s diverse superintendents’ candidate pool
- Provide opportunities for African American women to enter the superintendent’s position

**Figure 6.** Aspiration to the Superintendency: Board of Education Responsibilities

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Possess confidence in the capability to do the job
- Seek help/suggestions with specific professional (district)/personal dilemmas, when needed
- Establish and maintain a national mentoring program
- Establish and maintain a national networking system
- Use successes from other aspects of their lives to their advantage in the superintendency
- Learn how to negotiate the “race issue” and put it into proper perspective
- Learn not to let the “race issue” cloud judgment or influence what is presented to public
- Perform job, putting student achievement at the forefront
- Be open to options for educating children that are more innovative than school board members and superintendents consider when thinking about developing educational programs for children

**Figure 7.** Retention in the Superintendency: Personal Development
**Figure 8. Retention in the Superintendency: Board of Education Responsibilities**

Summary

Narrative portraits of an almost unknown sector in the public education system, the African American woman as superintendent, emerged through the mostly candid responses of 8 African American women who have served in this top executive education position. In this chapter the author discussed four general research areas inclusive of the 14 themes generated from the participants’ interview data. An integration of the collected data and the analysis methods combined to produce these findings, which, according to this researcher, best reflect the participants’ perspectives.
CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

While critical incidents specific to the lived experiences of the individual participants during their superintendencies were highlighted in Chapter 4, the common patterns found among the distinguished experiences of these 8 women were described in Chapter 5. Presented in the final chapter of this dissertation are a summary of the study and a discussion of the findings, conclusions, recommendations for further research, and recommendations for prevailing leadership practice. The purpose of the latter sections is to expand upon the concepts studied in an effort to provide enhanced understanding of their influence on the retention of African American women superintendents in their leadership role within public education.

Summary

Brought to the New World as chattel, African American men, women, and children were denied their most basic human right, freedom. Unwanted, yet sought after, and bought, used up, and sold as property, African American women particularly have been denigrated and placed at the very bottom rung of every order. Since their enslaved arrival in early 1600s America, these women have struggled and fought against the unequivocal injustices of race, gender, and class oppression. Members of the colonial governing bodies who passed the law creating an overt racial caste system certainly contributed to the invisibility of all African Americans in America, but especially to the obscurity of African American women (Amott & Matthaei, 1996).

Understanding the leader she has become today mandates thorough awareness of the incomparable circumstances the African American woman historically encountered.
Scant information exists prior to the 1800s, detailing many aspects of their daily lives, particularly their education. However, educational opportunities were usually reserved for the rich, White elite, except in some northern states where free, financially well-off African Americans supported schools for their children (Berry & Blassingame, 1982). Additionally, some White altruistic benefactors set up schools for African Americans in the 1700s (Berry & Blassingame, 1982; Woodson, 1968).

Generally, especially in the southern states, an educated African American was an exception rather than the rule, for the laws reserved free education for White children over the age of 5 (Funke, 1920). In the slave states, the law even denied a slave the right to learn how to read (Woodson, 1968). However, keeping the majority of the slaves illiterate did not stop African American women from learning how to read. Once enough of the skill was learned by one of them, another one was taught. No matter how dangerous the situation was (e.g., from classes taken by moonlight to instruction given by lamplight), the desire to learn was greater than fear of the “master’s whip” (Freedman, 1999).

Not all African Americans were slaves, nor were they all poor (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Hine & Thompson, 1998; Woodson, 1968). For both the free and the enslaved, education was the key to citizenship. Women, too, became activists and abolitionists (Hine & Thompson, 1998). A small percentage graduated from colleges and universities as a select few White institutions’ doors were slowly opened for Blacks. Gaining their freedom brought about little change for many African Americans, but working to obtain an education continued. The women taught classes; they founded schools, colleges, and benevolent societies (Hine & Thompson, 1997; Perkins, 1980); and
they worked to uplift their race and gender through education (Hine, 1994; Perkins, 1980). Unquestionably, today’s African American women leaders stand on the shoulders of giants, those courageous pioneers who tirelessly worked to uplift their gender and their race.

The identification and documentation of the experiences in the superintendency unique to African American women and leading to their decision to exit the position were the impetus behind this study. The dearth of research on the almost silent voices of women in the K-12 top-executive leadership position necessitated providing such an opportunity, through the presentation of an exclusive body of knowledge, to accomplish these three goals: first, to reveal the lived experiences of these women; second, to enrich the literature; and third, to give African American women aspiring to the superintendency a very real insider’s view that should assist them in their preparation for and retention in this important leadership position.

In terms of research design, a phenomenological focused qualitative study was conducted using a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide (Appendix D) to address the following overarching question: What predominant factors caused African American women superintendents to exit prematurely, either voluntarily or involuntarily, from the K-12 public school superintendency? In an effort to answer the primary question, the following secondary research questions were investigated:

1. How do African American women superintendents perceive and describe their experience as public school superintendent?

2. Did either their race and/or gender have an impact on their superintendencies? What were the situations or circumstances?
3. What advice would they give to aspiring African American women about career preparation, experiences, competencies, and overall guidance in terms of how to achieve longevity in the public school superintendency?

Using Kvale’s (1996) 12 aspects of the research interview, an interview guide (Appendix D) was developed to elicit myriad descriptive experiences based on the primary and secondary research questions. After being pilot tested with 3 incumbent African American women superintendents, very minor changes were made to produce a more thorough set of interview questions.

Following an extensive search to locate former African American women superintendents who had voluntarily or involuntarily left the superintendency and had chosen to make a difference in the education of children through other leadership positions, 7 women agreed to participate in this study. Because 1 of the 3 pilot-test participants had experienced a voluntary premature departure from her first superintendency, she was selected as the study’s 8th participant.

The face-to-face, digitally recorded interviews, 1.5 to 2 hours in length, were conducted in 6 states where the researcher was invited into the homes of 5 women and into the offices of 2 women. Due to the demanding schedule of 1 woman, a telephone interview was approved, arranged, and completed.

The sample for this study included 8 African American women former public school superintendents who had served in not more than two superintendencies from 2–15 years in districts of varied types (e.g., rural, suburban, urban) from the eastern to the western regions of the United States. Their career paths were as diverse as the ages at which they assumed their first superintendency.
Following each interview the researcher first briefly summarized the experience, noting observations of the location, the individual, and the establishment of trust, as well as rapport; and then she transcribed the interview tapes. Each participant received a paper copy of her interview transcript for review, authentication, and additions and/or clarification of her responses to the questions. Other than having 2 participants change a few words that had been unclear as recorded, no other modifications were needed.

Using the steps in Creswell’s (1998) spiral analysis (pp. 142–146) and the key points from Boyatzis’ (1998) definition of thematic analysis (p. 5) ensured the researcher of an extensive and rigorous examination of the information obtained through the intensive research interviews. Based on these analyses, 18 sub-themes under the four research areas (i.e., exiting, leadership, race and gender, advice and strategies for success) became apparent.

The investigation of the premature departure of African American women from the superintendency, the key focus of this study, revealed that no one critical incident prompted the exit of any of these 8 participants from their position. Instead, the participants acknowledged that several issues over time were central to their decision-making process. Naturally, certain concerns (e.g., personal growth, various types and the intensity of conflict with members of the board of education, a desire to experience leadership in other educational arenas, and so forth) were more influential to some participants than others.

The exit findings were grouped into two major categories (i.e., pushes and pulls) under which 6 themes emerged. Common to 4 participants were the pulls, which included the themes like “finding other mountains to climb” (i.e., the need to identify other
educational arenas in which to continue making the education of all children their priority; “doing the things I had come to do” (e.g., feeling that the goals she had set when she began the position had been accomplished quite successfully); “regaining control of my life” (e.g., feeling the weight of the position and the desire to have more control over her own life by stepping out of the glass box); and “leaving on her own terms: letting the exit happen” (e.g., departing when she knew or felt that the time was right, on her own terms, not terms dictated by something or someone else).

The themes revealed under pushes relevant to the other 4 participants were “fighting an uphill battle: corrupt, dysfunctional, racist, undermining, and micromanaging boards of education” (e.g., dishonest, unethical, and increasingly negative relationships between or among members of the board of education and the superintendent); and “exercising caution: politics at work” (e.g., political factors such as staffing and finances which overlap with the first theme).

Under the research area of leadership, information from the participants revealed 4 salient themes focusing on the qualities of the women in the position (e.g., their skills, knowledge, and capabilities not only in curriculum and instruction but in budgeting, finance, and facilities); effectiveness (their high level of performance and attainment in other leadership positions); remembering their legacies (their district-wide, sometimes national accomplishments during their tenure in the areas of student achievement, professional development for teachers as well as administrators, team building, new national and international programs beneficial to the educational growth of students); and their passion for the position: motivation behind the ascent (the motives behind their aspiration for and appointment to the position).
A prominent recurrent pattern found in the fourth research area, race and gender, was the blurry line between race and gender, where some participants expressed their inability to distinguish between the biases thrust upon them. Was racism or sexism involved? The second theme, race: an asset, a liability, or just “their problem,” focused on the pros and cons of being an African American in the superintendent position. Additionally, some participants, confident in who they were as accomplished women educators, saw race as a non-issue for them and treated the topic as such. Dealing with gender bias, the third theme, stood out for some participants as they had encountered the issue in job positions before and during the superintendency (e.g., salary gaps).

Finally, the themes in the last research area, advice, fell into these two categories: 1) strategies to retain African American women superintendents, and 2) advice for African American women aspiring to the superintendency. The 4 themes were personal development, academic preparation/professional development, board of education responsibilities, and societal attitudes. However, as the participants noted, sometimes the strategies needed to obtain a superintendent position were the same ones required to retain the position. Basically, with the myriad responsibilities, duties, and activities of the superintendent position being ongoing and not static, neither can the woman’s personal, academic, and professional growth become stagnant.

The stories, or lived experiences, of the 8 African American women former superintendents of public schools were the first-hand knowledge and point of view (Critical Race Theory tenet #4, centrality of experiential knowledge) of a group marginalized in three ways: 1) by race as African Americans, 2) by gender as women, and 3) by previous jobs as public school superintendent. The voice of an almost silent
population of educators brings a different perspective to the position, different than the White male, different than the White female. The persistent absence of the minority, in this case, the African American woman, continues to be a very troubling reality.

The first tenet of critical race theory (CRT)—that race and racism are endemic—comes to the forefront loud and clear in the voices of 3 participants as they shared specifics about their own realities.

- For 2 participants, the landscape was their superintendencies. For example, racist comments were frequently mouthed unabashedly by some members of the board of education in the presence of Dr. Melane. Then, Dr. Cartier offered the analogy between her possible interim superintendent status and the small Black statues that were used to hold the horse’s reins and that once adorned the front lawns of the stately plantation homes. Furthermore, the angry reaction of a group of White parents to her suggestion of temporarily housing their children with Black students spoke to racism being endemic.
- For 1 participant, her life formed the vista. As Dr. Jacoby said, every day she was reminded that the Black color of her skin was more of a stigma in today’s world than any other form of prejudice.

Perhaps, as CRT theorists have maintained, because race and racism are so enmeshed, so endemic in the American way of life, the other 5 participants did not and could not even acknowledge or recognize that such elements of discrimination were even present in their lives.

Clearly, the African American woman does not possess the same qualities and characteristics as does the person who usually occupies the superintendent’s chair, the
White male. Therefore, embedded in others’ skepticism about the skills, the leadership ability, the knowledge, and even the intelligence of the African American woman are the stereotypical ideas that anyone different from the norm cannot possibly be competent enough to handle the responsibilities that come with the position of the superintendent of schools.

Conclusions

The intent of this researcher was to ascertain the prominent factors contributing to the early voluntary and involuntary departure of African American women superintendents from their positions. Thus, 8 African American women who had served as public school superintendents were asked to reflect upon and discuss their experiences in the superintendency in order to contribute their insights about several generally un-researched facets of this executive-level position. Emerging from their introspection were prevalent themes that formed the foundation for major conclusions. Because these results were based on the perspicacity provided by 8 African American women who had served as public school superintendents in as many as 6 states in various geographic regions, discretion should be exercised in the interpretation of these conclusions. The following 8 conclusions drawn from rich data and findings are illustrative only of the self-reflections of this study’s participants:

1. Rather than compromise ethical principles or values, commit illegal acts, submit to micromanagement, or suffer racism in order to retain the position, the African American women involved in this research were willing to relinquish their superintendencies. In fact, issues such as these set the stage for conflict between or among superintendents and various board members. Within this realm lay a major
impetus for this study’s African American women participants to exit the superintendency. These concerns were not of equal significance to each of the 8 participants but proved to be a source of discontent for half of the women in the study who had cited no barriers to their ascent to the position. However, once hired, these women experienced ongoing conflict amid their success. Moreover, 2 participants took a very strong moral stand and refused to become embroiled in unethical or illegal behavior.

Related research on exit factors for women superintendents by Allen (1996), Tallerico et al. (1993, 1994), and Williams (2007) revealed moral or ethical clashes (p. 9) with members of the boards of education as an important “political push” factor contributing to exit decisions of their studies’ respondents. Although inclusive of both men and women, similar findings were noted in studies by Czaja and Harman (1999) and Glass and Franceschini (2007), authors of a nationwide mid-decade study of the superintendency. Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that “over 16% of 1,326 superintendents [male and female] said they left a district due to ethical problems with a board” (p. 78).

Only 1 participant in the present study specifically cited school board micromanagement as a premier exit factor. However, the contentious micromanagement issue and others (e.g., ethical problems, illegal acts, racism), often subsumed under the broad heading of superintendent/board conflict or relations, was ranked as highly important in several studies (Cunningham & Hentges, 1982; Glass, 1992; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; McKay & Grady, 1994; Tallerico et al., 1994) as 1 of the top 5 reasons that both minority and non-minority men and women exited the superintendency. Of the 89 women responding to the category of exiting in the 10-year study of the
superintendency, Glass et al. (2000) indicated that 14.6% of the respondents had exited prior superintendent positions because of board conflict, as had 19.6% (47) minority superintendent respondents. Furthermore, Brunner and Grogan (2007) noted that “board micromanagement was perceived as an inhibitor to the superintendent’s success by twice as many women-of-color superintendents (40% as compared to 19%)” (p. 117).

In addition to racism being a challenge for African American women while serving in a superintendent’s position (Daye, 2007; Johnson, 2006) as aptly described by 1 participant in the present study, other research (Dunlop, 1997; Jones-Mitchell, 1993; Newton, 2003; Revere, 1985; Rowan, 2006) supported the fact that racism is a barrier even when African American women are seeking the position. With the exception of the current study, only one investigation, The Rise and Fall of Black Women Public School Superintendents (Rivers, 2007) has even focused on the factors that influence African American women to exit from the superintendency. According to Rivers (2007), 3 of 4 African American women participants in her study indicated that “race played a part in their tenure as superintendent” (p. v) as opposed to 1 of the 8 women in the present study.

2. African American women in this study acknowledged the existence of politics in the superintendency but were not always prepared to handle its unexpected fierce intensity. Their political astuteness not withstanding, 5 of the 8 participants recognized the significant and unforeseen impact that politics exerted on their superintendencies. Chapman and Chapman (1997) described the politics experienced by 18 beginning superintendents as external politics (e.g., desegregation cases and legal challenges to equity in state funding [p. 210] and mayor takeovers) and internal politics (e.g., “political activities of school board members” [p. 213]) equivalent to “land mines waiting to
explode under wary feet” (p. 217). Issues with members of the board of education pertaining to the dismissal of central office personnel, requests for increased school budgets, and the personal agendas of some school board members appeared to have been land mines of frustration for 5 participants in this research endeavor.

Conclusions drawn from research specific to African American women (Bush, 2000), as well as African American women and men (Alston, 1996), were similar to the expressed conclusion in the present study. From Bush’s (2000) research of 8 African American and 2 Hispanic superintendent participants, she concluded that “politics is the major frustration experienced on the job” (p. v.), while Alston (1996) determined that African American women’s “lack of awareness of political maneuvers” (p. iv) signified an area of great concern.

Although none of the 5 women in this research study attributed their exit from the superintendency to politics, Dana and Boursaw (2006) asserted that “politics can play a key role in the decision for the school board and superintendent to separate” (p. 144). In fact, Tallerico et al. (1993) indicated that politics was the one persistent theme in their data analysis for the involuntary exit of women (not just African American women, however) from the superintendency. In her research on the involuntary separation of superintendents from their positions, Mertzger (1997) reported comparable findings in that “the political agendas of board members were mentioned by 33 of the 39 superintendents as a factor contributing to their leaving” (p. 21).

3. Sexism/gender bias was more of a challenge during their superintendencies than was racism for the African American women former superintendents involved in this study. The consensus of 6 of the 8 women was that during their superintendencies, racism
presented no challenge or was less challenging than sexism/gender bias. A similar conclusion was reported in other research on African American women superintendents (Bush, 2000; Jackson, 1999; Rivers, 2007; Vaughn, 2008). Grogan (1999) observed that “Many of the traditional scholars consider that gender issues are no longer burning ones” (p. 523). Contrarily, women in the present study described incidents of being bullied, singled out for knowledge (or lack thereof) of the latest fashion trends, being openly berated by men in school board meetings, and accused of not knowing how to manage large budgets. At least 2 participants questioned whether these same behaviors and the same questions would be directed to their White male counterparts. From the interviews of the 4 Texas incumbent African American women superintendents, Vaughn (2008) concluded that gender remained a constant barrier for the participants during their ascent and tenure. On the contrary, Alston (1996) found that, in comparison to other issues of the superintendency, racism and gender bias ranked very low for both the African American women and men superintendents participating in her research.

When reflecting on racially explosive incidents through the voice of 1 participant, a horrific situation of overt racism directed at her and her family was described; regardless, somehow she remained steadfast and successful in her 8.5 years of service as superintendent. Another interviewee acknowledged tolerating the racist words and actions of school board members for a minimum occupancy of the first superintendency, and a third participant expressively indicated her inner feelings that a Black face in America carried a greater stigma than did gender. Four of 8 participants also recognized and admitted that sometimes the line between racism and sexism was quite faint and
discreet. This finding was congruent with results from other studies (Alston, 1999; Bush, 2000).

4. During their superintendencies and in prior leadership positions, research participants acknowledged the presence of a consistent need to prove and re-prove their competence to members of the board of education, central office staff, and some other constituencies. Four of the 8 interviewees recognized this situation as an insidious virus, a challenge, which wove its way through the types of questions asked, the comments expressing skepticism of decisions made, and the second-guessing from others (e.g., board members, central office staff, business officials, and other women). Brunner and Grogan (2007), in a 2003 nationwide study, and other researchers (Daye, 2007; Vaughn, 2008) indicated that women-of-color superintendents articulated similar sentiments regarding the perception of others toward their competency. The women in the present study confidently spoke of having the skills, knowledge, and capabilities needed to carry out the tasks, role, and responsibilities of the position. However, a gap appears to exist between performance expectations and reality in terms of leadership and accountability outcomes when African American women superintendents are involved in the scenario.

5. Regardless of whether their 2-year or 15-year tenures were relatively calm or turbulent, the African American women who participated in this study perceived themselves as effective leaders having had successful terms as superintendents. As a matter of fact, 1 participant attributed her high level of effectiveness as being one factor that contributed to her dismissal. Glass and Franceschini (2007) noted that the women participants in their 2006 national study considered themselves to be very effective (p. 52) leaders, as did the majority of the participants in the present study. Although not
disaggregated by gender, in three national studies (Glass, 1992; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007), based on their self-perception, data indicated that superintendents in the largest urban districts rated themselves as very effective. In the present study, district size in terms of student population did not appear to affect the high self-perception rating of the participants. The self-reported rating of highly effective for the minority sample in the 2000 (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner) study was 94.1%.

6. Place-bound succession was prevalent among the former African American women superintendents studied. Seventy-five percent of the participants were appointed to their first superintendency from within their school districts. Similarly, Glass (1992) reported that “minority and women superintendents succeed to their positions from inside the district about as often as non-minority and male superintendents” (p. 59). However, 8 years later, according to the sampled participants, Brunner (2000) indicated that more women than men had received promotions from inside the districts. Interestingly, the second superintendency of 2 of the 8 women was career bound, the same situation that was reported for the incumbent.

7. Based on the results of this research effort, African American women are recruited and appointed to superintendent positions in a variety of school districts, not just to large minority-majority student populated urban districts in crisis. In this research study, 4 (50%) participants served in minority-majority school districts during their first superintendency, while 3 (37%) held suburban first-year superintendencies with majority-majority student populations. One (12.5%) participant served in a rural district with a majority-majority student population.
Literature is replete with research (Arnez, 1986; Bell, 1988; Bjork & Rodgers, 1999; Edson, 1987; Hill & Ragland, 1995, Newton, 2003; Scott, 1980; Townsel & Banks, 1975; Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkison, 1986) indicative of African American women superintendents having been selected as the “messiah, scapegoat, and the sacrificial lamb” (Hill & Ragland, 1995, p. 17) for the large urban, minority-majority school district experiencing a major financial, legal, or human-relations tragedy. Findings from national studies (Glass, 1992; Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000) were usually less specific in that the results are not disaggregated by race or by gender. For example, Glass and Franceschini (2007) stated that “minority superintendents often serve in very large urban districts with substantial numbers of minority students” (p. 17).

Brunner and Grogan (2007) offered a more explicit view resulting from the 2003 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) National Survey of U.S. Women Superintendents and Central Office Administrators, the largest study of women in these positions: “. . . there were many more women of color superintendents in urban districts than white women—nearly four times as many (27% compared to 7%)” (p. 111). This finding is congruent with Jackson’s (1999) research results.

8. The K-12 public education system lost too soon the voices of African American women educators who had seized the power of the superintendency to make a difference in the education of all children, but these women instead took their expertise, passion, and dedication to other venues. Seven of the 8 participants exited the superintendency. One participant moved to a small, urban, minority-majority student populated district as superintendent, while a second one served in an interim position for a year; she remained at the K–12 education level but in another position. Working as consultants for private
firms and as professors in higher education and serving as staff members in other educationally focused organizations became the chosen career paths for the remaining 6 African American women.

Not only were the outspoken voices of the advocates for all children lost, but gone also from the executive level of public education were role models for the children and leadership models for other women. As Murtadha-Watts (2000) stated, “Although often working in stormy climates, many women of color bring to schools leadership models that support a passion and determination to see that all children learn despite poverty and other inhibiting factors” (p. 614).

The office of the superintendent is a powerful and prestigious position. No matter the path traveled to reach the lofty position or the process (e.g., recruited, appointed, or selected) involved in their selection, all the women in the present study reiterated their commitment to serve the children and expressed an obligation to make collaborative decisions to improve the performance of the teachers as a means of increasing educational attainment for all students (Hudson, Wesson, & Marcano, 1998; Jackson, 1999; Murtadha-Watts, 2000; Revere, 1985; Rowan, 2006; Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

Recommendations for Further Research

To increase the visibility of and to hear the voices of a once ignored and often silenced population demands continued research of the African American women occupying the position of public school superintendent. While some minor growth in information collection on White women superintendents has been noted in recent years, abundant data on the superintendency exist, in actuality, only about the White male. Therefore, the need to increase beyond 1 or 2 pages of knowledge about African
American women superintendents is undeniable. In that regard, this researcher offers the following recommendations for future studies on the African American woman superintendent.

1. Conduct a similar qualitative study to compare and contrast the experiences of an equal number of African American women, White women, and Hispanic women superintendents who have exited the superintendency, voluntarily or involuntarily. In addition to individual interviews, use focus interview sessions to collect data and expand the information available about the conditions surrounding the exiting of women superintendents.

2. Replicate Brunner and Grogan’s 2003 national study of women superintendents by narrowing the focus to African American women superintendents. In major national studies, African American women continue to be included under the umbrella of women-of-color or labeled simply as members of a minority group. Additionally, statistical data on African American women superintendents remain nearly nonexistent; therefore, these data must be collected systematically and made available to members of the educational and research communities.

3. Analyze Glass and Franceschini’s (2007) data by race and gender to answer a variety of questions about African American and White women superintendents. According to Glass and Franceschini (2007), “superintendents typically serve 17–18 years” (p. 31). These data were not disaggregated by race or gender. However, since the superintendency is 78% White male (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), how many of the individuals who
serve 17–18 years are women? How many are African American women?

What factors contributed to their longevity/retention in the position/profession?

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the results of this research, the exit of an African American woman superintendent can be attributed to multiple factors present throughout the particular school district culture and influenced by actions of boards of education members as well as by the personal issues of the individual superintendent herself. Furthermore, conflict or the poor relationship between/among school board members and superintendents was a major factor contributing to the exit from the superintendency for half of this study’s participants. Therefore, the first six recommendations in the area of prevailing practice are specifically directed to personnel in organizations working with members of local school boards (e.g., state boards of education and the National School Boards Association) and to incumbent as well as potential school board members.

The results of a 2008 survey (Appendix I) by the National School Boards Association (NSBA) of local school boards indicated that only 20 of the 44 responding state school board associations required training of their members. Additionally, implementing the far-reaching tenets of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation necessitates that all board members (new and incumbent) be able to receive, review, analyze, and accurately synthesize current information about NCLB on a routine basis. While a minimal number of excellent board training programs with mandatory requirements exist in some states, the topic must definitely be addressed by educational leaders in states where no mandated board member training programs exist.
The following six recommendations specifically address issues pertaining to the mandatory initial training and continued professional development of active local school board members:

1. Create and maintain with personnel in the US Department of Education a demographic database for all public school superintendents. Members of local boards of education in every type of school district should be required to submit demographics of incumbent superintendents on a yearly basis; changes in leadership must be immediately noted. In this age of technology, which allows the creation and production of statistical data by several methods, the absence of a nationwide database about one of America’s premier executive positions is tragic. Although not debilitating, this dearth of information is a major barrier to researchers in nationally recognized educational organizations and to novice student researchers seeking information on this specific population of educators/leaders.

2. Join forces to create common guidelines and a core curriculum for mandated and optional educational training programs (academies) intended for new and incumbent members of boards of education.

3. Require a potential candidate for school board membership to declare her/his eligibility beyond a particular biological age, interest, US citizenship, and residency. Complete a prescribed mandatory, preliminary training program highlighting specific aspects of school board activity (e.g., board and superintendent relations, roles and responsibilities, student achievement issues, legal issues in education, race and gender diversity, superintendent
selection and evaluation, etc.). Certification of completion must be a part of legal documentation presented for candidacy.

4. Establish an educational program for the continued training of incumbent school board members. Such a program should offer a broad spectrum of current practices and topics inclusive of cultural diversity; local school governance; and federal, state, and local educational policies. Additionally, participation can provide constant learning in identified areas, thereby not allowing it on the job (i.e., board stagnation).

5. Assess continuously and update all training programs pursuant to assisting novice and veteran board members in staying abreast of current federal, state, and local policies that pertain to the education of all children; in addition, help such persons represent, at all times, the best educational interest for all children.

6. Require gatekeepers (e.g., members of private search firms and school boards or national associations with established superintendent search committees) to receive on a continual basis training in diversity and cross-cultural awareness to ensure employment opportunities for a heterogeneous pool of aspiring superintendent applicants. Researchers (Banks, 1999; Tallerico, 2000) have indicated that gatekeepers pose a significant barrier to superintendent applicants whose demographics are outside those of the dominant culture represented in the general population as well as in the school district.

The last set of practice-oriented recommendations is addressed to staff members in national and state associations of school administrators and/or superintendents,
incumbent African American women superintendents as well as aspirants, university administrators, and university faculty members in educational leadership programs:

1. Given the respect bestowed by members of the general public and educational professionals alike upon national and statewide associations composed of superintendents, leaders of these organizations can usually serve as change agents and spokespersons for important causes. Clearly, influential, nationally known professionals can advocate for the implementation of these recommendations.

- Providing ongoing (e.g., quarterly or bi-annually) support to incumbent women superintendents through mini-conferences and seminars on salient leadership topics.

- Disseminating (and funding, if possible) through presentations, oral, visual, and/or print, selected authentic dissertation research on African American women superintendents and other women-of-color so that novice and veteran women superintendents can be informed of the lived experiences of former women superintendents. Unless this information is published, the research will be known, unfortunately, by only a small population of master’s and doctoral students. Hopefully, men and women in positions of leadership throughout the educational sector can benefit from such research.

- Establishing a pool of former African American and White women superintendents to serve as mentors for women aspiring to the superintendency. The lack of women mentors has been a
major problem area, especially for African American women aspiring to the superintendency. Clearly, the availability of women who come from the same gender, cultural, and racial background can provide very positive role models for leadership aspirants and will likely help establish a needed support network for resolving personal and professional dilemmas. These former and/or veteran African American women superintendents can also become an inclusive and active part of any state or national associations’ bureaus of speakers.

2. African American women educators who aspire to become superintendents should consider taking the following actions that were suggested by the participants in this research study:
   - In addition to completing formal college and university leadership programs, engage in future superintendent programs or future superintendent academies that provide an in-depth curriculum relative to the significant areas needed in leading the school district of tomorrow. African American women participants in the current study supported this practice as one that will contribute much to the knowledge and skill development in the educational repertoire of an aspirant. Inclusive in these professional development programs should be courses to enhance women’s skills in politics, team building, and financial management.
   - Join business and educational local, state, and national leadership organizations that provide access to renowned male and female leaders at conferences and seminars. In addition to the importance of meeting male
power figures, more than 1 participant in the study suggested that attendance at these functions allows women aspirants to gain first-hand knowledge of the rewards, benefits, struggles, and resiliency of women executives. Attendance, particularly at conferences sponsored by women’s business organizations, will allow women African American superintendents to step outside of the educational world and network with other minority females in powerful positions throughout various organizations in the region, state, or nation.

3. African American women incumbent superintendents should consider attending ongoing leadership conferences that

- offer solutions and expertise in their self-evaluated areas of skill deficiency and
- provide needed support from a similar population of leaders. These courageous pioneer leaders are critical advocates, role models, and mentors in the process of ensuring the placement of other African American women in future public school chief executive positions. Moreover, their success and retention in the superintendency are absolutely essential, given the need to use American’s scarce leadership talent pool effectively. In addition, isolation in the superintendency has been named a critical and often unacknowledged lax area for all women superintendents. Attendance at such conferences that allow women the opportunity to communicate with other women in administration and leadership positions could strengthen their tenacity and confidence.
4. Faculty members in colleges and universities offering a leadership program for educational administrators who have not already done so should consider implementing these ideas:

- Establishing superintendent academies like those in operation through several universities and state administrators’ associations (e.g., the Harvard Urban Superintendents’ Program, the Broad Superintendents’ Academy, The University of Alabama Superintendents’ Academy, Mississippi Superintendents’ Academy, Association of California School Administrators’ Academy), thereby opening up additional professional development opportunities specifically for those aspiring to the superintendency. With such a major limit on the new cohorts entering these programs, the existence of additional academies would allow more women the opportunity to move into the pipeline for the superintendency. In settings such as these academies, the curriculum should focus on factors that researchers have confirmed as contributing to the exit of women from the superintendency.

- Enhancing their leadership programs by moving from the offering of one token course on women in educational leadership to an expanded comprehensive program of studies with several courses on women in educational leadership promoting cultural, race, and gender diversity. Societal attitudes cannot be changed if individuals remain uninformed. Additionally, listening to the voices of the former African American women superintendents in the current study, college and university leaders
and faculty members should create programs to enhance women’s skills in politics, finance, and public relations.

Summary

Count among the “women who have dared to dream differently” (Brunner, 1999, p. 7) these 8 phenomenal former women superintendents, who as participants in this research contributed to understanding how African American women experience the superintendency. This qualitative study, with a phenomenological focus, allowed these women to share their unique superintendencies different from one another yet similar in some instances. Because of who they are, their arrival on the “terrain” (Brunner, 1999, p. 7) was expected (i.e., the first women, the first African American, the first African American women in a position forever dominated by a White male); yet the overt reactions were unexpected, even for a few of them.

As they shared their drive, their ambitious push along their various paths, they revealed some of their innermost thoughts about themselves, their families, the men and women who supported them, the men and women who did not support them, and the knowledge and experiences that shaped the 8 women who had arrived so fresh and eager at the superintendent’s office door. Their readiness was indicated by an array of advanced degrees, ambition, commitment, administrative competence, and dedication to the children for whom they would assume the role and responsibilities for which they had either been recruited or selected. Interestingly, for these women, their paths had not been cluttered with the discriminatory acts usually directed at African American women.

The richness of their stories and their perceptions of their lived experiences of that time (i.e., tenure in the superintendency) in their lives pointed to their successes and
sometimes to their conflicts. The issues some of them faced became the impetus for leaving the superintendency. For others, leaving after a number of successful years at the helm of the most powerful and prestigious position in public school leadership was their choice. The superintendency was only a stop-over for all of these ambitious women, whose lights have continued to shine brightly for children as they simply took their knowledge and expertise to a different playing field.

These few extraordinary African American women educators and others like them have cut a trail and walked it; those who widened the path also walked it. Now more African American women can and need to take that walk. Today, the path has become an even wider and, perhaps, smoother one. However, for African American women educators, particularly for African American women superintendents, the existing path is much too short; so much walking has yet to be done to create a road filled with opportunities.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
Appendix A

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

September 26, 2005

Ms. Minta Downing
Department of Leadership and Counseling

RE: “African American Women Superintendents: Their Point of Exit”

The Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Eastern Michigan University has granted approval to your proposal: “African American Women Superintendents: Their Point of Exit”.

After careful review of your application, the IRB determined that the rights and welfare of the individual subjects involved in this research are carefully guarded. Additionally, the methods used to obtain informed consent are appropriate, and the individuals are not at a risk.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the IRB of any change in the protocol that might alter your research in any manner that differs from that upon which this approval is based. Approval of this project applies for one year from the date of this letter. If your data collection continues beyond the one-year period, you must apply for a renewal.

On behalf of the Human Subjects Committee, I wish you success in conducting your research.

Sincerely,

Patrick Melia
Dr. Patrick Melia
Administrative Co-Chair
Human Subjects Committee

CC: Dr. Steve Pernecky, Faculty Co-Chair
   Dr. Martha Tack
Appendix B
Letter of Invitation

May 2005

Dear

As noted on the attached biographical data sheet, I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program within the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University. The purpose of this letter is to request your involvement in my dissertation research on “African American Women Superintendents: Their Point of Exit.” Specifically, my research focus is on African American women who served as public school superintendent but exited the position and chose not to seek another superintendency.

As an African American woman public school superintendent, you have definitely changed history. Now we need to preserve your story so other African American women can benefit from your insights and experiences. Why is your involvement in this research so important? First, because research and scholarly works on the African American woman superintendent are almost nonexistent, women of color have few resources to use in learning about factors that have an impact on the decision to exit this pivotal executive position. Moreover, given that only 5.1% of superintendents in America are African American women, role models are limited; therefore, the loss of a dynamic leader like you is truly a tragedy, and we must do everything we can to retain the African American women who become public school superintendents.

Having worked in the Detroit Public Schools as an African American woman administrator for 18 years, I am quite familiar with the issues that African American women encounter as they attempt to move up the career ladder from the principalship to the superintendency. My first hand experiences and observations made me wonder why more African American women are not superintendents. In addition, when talented African American women make it to the superintendency, why do they leave before the end of their contracts?

I am asking you as one of only a few former African American women superintendents in the country to help me by participating in a two-to-three hour personal interview. I understand that your time is extremely valuable, but we will use it wisely. Following the enclosed Interview guide as a tentative outline will allow me to gather rich information that only you can provide, based on your unique experiences, insights, and observations.

Clearly, having the opportunity to interview you and learn from you will be a distinct honor for me. More importantly, sharing the lessons you have learned along your leadership journey will perhaps allow future generations of African American women aspiring to the superintendency to advance more quickly and remain in the chief school
executive officer’s position longer so they can have a more lasting impact on the learning environment. With your assistance, maybe we can provide information that will help with retention of African American women superintendents whose leadership is desperately needed in public schools today.

If you have any questions, please contact either my dissertation chair, Dr. Martha W. Tack, Professor at Eastern Michigan University, at 734.487.0255 or Martha.Tack@emich.edu or me at 313.255.3299, or at mdowning@emich.edu. I will contact your office within a week hopefully to discuss the possibility of scheduling an appointment with you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Minta Downing
Doctoral Candidate

Enclosures
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

May 2005

I agree to participate in a dissertation research study that focuses on factors that contributed to African American women exiting their superintendent positions voluntarily or involuntarily. My participation will include a private two-to-three hour recorded interview in addition to providing time to respond to follow-up questions. After conclusions are drawn from the study, I will have a chance to review and confirm the accuracy of findings drawn from my interview. If I find that the results do not reflect accurately my perceptions, the researcher and I will negotiate until agreements are reached.

I understand that no harm or discomfort should occur since my identity will be kept confidential at all times. To ensure confidentiality, all interviews will be coded before the transcription process begins; and all identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms. The coding list and this consent form will be kept under lock and key at the researcher’s residence. Upon completion of the study, the coding list, the consent forms, the transcripts, and all audiotapes will be destroyed. Through reflections on experiences in my professional life, other highly competent women may be inspired; and deeper understanding of my experiences at work can be obtained. In addition, when the study is completed, I know I may request a copy of the findings. I further understand that data collected may be used for presentations and publications, but neither my name nor former school district(s) will be associated with the presentations or publications.

For questions about this research, please contact Minta Downing at (313) 355-3299, or her dissertation chair, Dr. Martha W. Tack, Professor, Eastern Michigan University, at (734) 487-0255. This research protocol has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee. Questions about the approval process can be answered by contacting either Dr. Patrick Melia or Dr. Steven Pernecky at (734) 487-0379.

I confirm that I know the purpose and parameters of the research study outlined above. I am aware that participation is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. I hereby provide consent for the use of my quotations and wish to participate in this research endeavor.

__________________________________   ________________________  
Name (Print or Type)                      Telephone

__________________________________   ________________________  
Signature                                Date
Appendix D

Interview Guide

African American Women Superintendents: Their Point of Exit

Reflections on Service as Superintendent:

1. What initially attracted you to the superintendency? Compare the realities of the superintendency to your initial attraction to the position.

2. What qualities made you the candidate and caused you to be selected? Please explain.

3. What did you like most about the superintendency?

4. Do you believe you were effective as a superintendent? On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being high, where do you place yourself and why?

5. What stands out as your most memorable experience as superintendent? Please elaborate.

6. What mistake in judgment caused the greatest problem for you as superintendent? Describe the scenario.

7. What do you want to be remembered for having done in the school district? What will you be remembered for having done?

8. As a superintendent, what did you learn that you did not expect to learn?

Impact of Race and Gender on Effectiveness as Superintendent:

9. How did your being an African American woman influence your effectiveness as a superintendent?

10. Describe and give one example of how your race affected the building of relationships with the following various groups:

   a. teachers
   b. superiors
   c. staff
   d. colleagues
   e. other
11. Describe and give one example of how your gender affected the building of relationships with following various groups:

a. teachers  
b. superiors  
c. staff  
d. colleagues  
e. other

12. Describe general perceptions and attitudes toward your leadership as expressed by the following:

a. the school community  
b. the unions  
c. board members  
d. other groups

13. Research has shown that some African American women superintendents who have experienced discrimination found it difficult to distinguish between the “isms” (i.e., racism and sexism). What have been your experiences with this issue? Please explain and describe one specific example

**Internal and External Barriers/Challenges Associated with Superintendent Effectiveness:**

14. What *internal organizational* barriers/challenges did you face as you moved through the ranks to the superintendency? Please explain and cite one example of such a barrier/challenge. How did you overcome this specific internal organizational barrier/challenge?

15. What *internal personal* barriers/challenges did you face as you moved through the ranks to the superintendency? Please explain and cite one example of such a barrier/challenge. How did you overcome this specific internal personal barrier/challenge?

16. What *external organizational* barriers/challenges did you face as you moved through the ranks to the superintendency? Please explain and cite one example of such a barrier/challenge. How did you overcome this specific external barrier/challenge?

17. What *external personal* barriers/challenges did you face as you moved through the ranks to the superintendency? Please explain and cite one example of such a barrier/challenge. How did you overcome this specific external personal barrier/challenge?
18. What roadblocks did you encounter as superintendent that precipitated your exit? Identify as many as you can remember. Please describe the three most influential of these roadblocks.

Mentoring/Networking:

19. As you aspired to the superintendency did you have a mentor or mentors? If yes, in what ways did the person or persons help you? If not, why not?

20. Who was your mentor(s) (i.e., male, female, African American, Caucasian, or other)? In what professional position was your mentor?

21. During your superintendency did you continue the mentor relationship? Why or why not?

22. Is it your belief that a mentor is necessary in order that an African American woman obtain a superintendency? Why or why not?

23. During your superintendency, were you a mentor? If yes, why? If not, why not? Whom did you mentor?

24. In which networks were you included? From which networks were you excluded?

Support Systems:

25. During your superintendency, what support system(s) did you use?

26. What kind of support system(s) was available to you during the time you exited and afterwards? Please provide one example of how the support system(s) was helpful to you.

Exiting:

27. What were the major professional factors that contributed to your decision to leave this superintendency? Please talk more specifically about the top three major factors.

28. What were the major personal factors that contributed to your decision to leave this superintendency? Please talk more specifically about the top three major factors.

29. Was there a “line in the sand” that pushed you out of this superintendency? Please elaborate.
30. What signals indicated that you had lost your power to lead or that it was time for you to exit? Please elaborate.

31. Were there conditions or circumstances that could have been adjusted so that you would have stayed? If so, please identify and explain.

32. What conditions or issues would cause you to seek another superintendency?

33. Given 20/20 hindsight, what, if anything, would you have done differently in terms of your exiting? Please explain.

34. Describe your relationship with each of the following key stakeholders during the last year of your superintendency.
   a. school board members
   b. media
   c. teachers
   d. unions
   e. community groups
   f. other groups you considered influential

35. Did you seek any of the following services when you exited?
   a. professional
   b. legal
   c. personal

   If so, please explain and give examples. If not, why not?

36. What else can you add that might help me understand why you chose to exit the superintendency? Are there any stories that stand out in your mind?

37. Please clarify your type of exit as either voluntary or involuntary.

Advice:

38. Given your experience, what do you think can be done to retain more African American women in the superintendency?

39. What advice would you give to African American women aspiring to the superintendency?

Reaction:

40. In her dissertation on African American women superintendents, Revere (1985) concluded that African American women are “recruited for the left over districts
and for failure” (pp.160-161) and are “expected to become miracle workers and turn despair into joy” (p. 160). What is your reaction to her conclusion? Is there any reason to expect that this is to change in the near future? Please explain.
Appendix E

Endorsement Letter

January 28, 2006
Name: 
Title: 
Address: 
City, State, ZIP

Dear:

Happy New Year! Let us hope that 2006 will bring all citizens of our world the peace, equity, justice, and freedom we so desperately seek. I certainly send my warmest wishes for a prosperous and healthy year to you and your family.

I recently learned about an exciting study of African American women superintendents being conducted by Ms. Minta Downing, a doctoral candidate in educational leadership at Eastern Michigan University (EMU), and wanted to tell you about it. This research investigation must be completed and the results shared broadly for these three critical reasons: the research and scholarship on the African American woman superintendent are almost nonexistent; the research design for the study is sound so the findings will be reliable and valid; and the enthusiasm as well as knowledge that Ms. Downing (an African American woman middle school administrator who retired not long ago from the Detroit Public Schools) brings to the research project will ensure its completion and the widespread distribution of salient findings.

Minta’s qualitative research focuses on “African American Women Superintendents: Their Point of Exit” using in-depth interviews with a carefully selected cadre of former African American women public school superintendents. The purpose of the study is to determine why these African American women exited their superintendencies, either voluntarily or involuntarily, and chose not to seek another one, but instead pursued another position either in education or in a different field. The impact of race and gender on their superintendencies will be assessed. In addition, barriers/challenges that these former women superintendents encountered as well as the strategies they used to overcome them will be focal points of discussion.

Why, then, am I writing to you? As President of The Mitchell Group, Inc. and Senior Consultant to the Michigan Leadership Institute, I am concerned about the low number of African American women who are employed as superintendents in “good” districts, and I am appalled at the high turnover rates. Clearly, our students need African American women leaders as role models; the field of education needs African American women’s expertise in building learning communities and fostering community values; and we need you to share your “gems of wisdom” as a means of possibly attracting and retaining talented African American women in this CEO position in our K-12 schools.

I am confident that the research is necessary and urge you to become a research participant. We need your help so please say “yes” when Minta contacts you to schedule an interview.

Most Cordially,

Charles Mitchell, Ed.D.
President, The Mitchell Group, Inc.
Appendix F

Minta Duncan Downing

Born in Gadsden, Alabama, Minta Duncan Downing graduated from the George Washington Carver High School. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in French and English from Stillman College, a historical Black college in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, followed by a Master of Education degree in English education from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan. The Educational Specialist degree in education administration was awarded also by Wayne State University.

Mrs. Downing began her professional career in the Sylacauga, Alabama, school district where she taught 11th and 12th grade French and English. She gained additional teaching experiences at various grade levels in the Detroit Public Schools. For 7 years, Mrs. Downing served as an Administrative Unit Head of social studies, special education, and physical education teachers. In 1990 she became the Assistant Principal at the Luther Burbank Middle School where she remained for 11 years. The 2002-03 school year was spent as Assistant Principal at the Krolik Alternative High School from which she retired. Currently, Mrs. Downing is a candidate for the Doctor of Education in educational leadership at Eastern Michigan University.
Appendix G

**Demographic Check Sheet**

This check sheet is designed to ensure that comprehensive background and demographic data are collected on each participant in this study. Using information from the vita and the interview, the researcher will compile these data.

Name: ____________________________________________

**Personal Information**

1. Birth Order: _______________  2. Number of Siblings: Female ________
                           Male ________

3. Parents’ Highest Educational Levels
   Mother or Female Guardian: ________________________________________
   Father or Male Guardian: _________________________________________

4. Number of superintendencies held during professional career: ____________


**Educational Background**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Field of Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Specialist degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Certificates (Please specify.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Other (Please specify.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Career Path to the Superintendency**

Positions held the grade level of the position, and the numbers of years in the position.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number of Years Position Held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Teacher</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Counselor</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Department Head</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Assistant Principal</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Principal</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Supervisor (of ______)</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Deputy Superintendent</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>__________</td>
<td>____________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First Superintendency**

1. Age when your first superintendency was assumed? ___________________________

2. Marital status during this superintendency? ________________________________

3. Occupation of Spouse/Partner (If applicable): ______________________________

4. Highest degree of Spouse/Partner (If applicable): __________________________

5. Children? a. Yes _____  If so, how many? ____________________

   Of school age? ___________  Living at Home? _______

   b. No  Children ______

6. In which type of district was the first superintendency?
   a. Rural _____  b. Suburban _____  c. Urban _____

7. Was this a financially troubled district? __________


   Largest Racial/Ethnic Student Population __________________________________


   Racial/Ethnic Composition of School Board? ________________________

10. Years in first superintendency? __________

11. Salary? _______________________________
**Last Superintendency**

1. Age at which you assumed your last superintendency? ____________________

2. Marital status during this superintendency? _____________________________

3. Children at home? _____________ Ages? _________________

4. In which type of district was your last superintendency?
   a. Rural _____ b. Suburban _____ c. Urban _____

5. Was this a financially troubled district? ________________________________

6. Student headcount? ________________________________________________

7. Racial/Ethnic Student Population? _________________________________
   Largest Racial/Ethnic Student Population? __________________________


9. Racial/Ethnic Composition of School Board? __________________________
   Largest Racial/Ethnic Composition of School Board? __________________

10. Salary? ______________________

11. Years in last superintendency? ________________________________

12. Date when the last superintendency was exited? ____________________
Appendix H

Letter of Confirmation

Name
Address
City, State and Zip

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research on “African American Women Superintendents: Their Point of Exit,” at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. I am enthusiastic about the opportunity to meet with you and learn about your experiences on this most important topic. Please know that I sincerely appreciate your time and your assistance.

Although a few studies have explored the exiting phenomenon among former White women superintendents, research among former African American women superintendents is almost nonexistent. In fact, there is a paucity of research on this subject in general. Therefore, this study is being conducted to describe and document the experiences of former African American women superintendents who decided to exit, voluntarily or involuntarily, their public school superintendencies and not seek another one. The impact of race and gender on the exiting decision will be explored and an assessment will be made of other challenges encountered, as well as their strategies for overcoming these obstacles.

This letter is to confirm the date, time, and place of the interview we have scheduled.

Date: ____________________
Time: ________________
Place: ________________

Enclosed are the interview guide and the Informed Consent Form that briefly summarizes the intention of this research and emphasizes the voluntary nature of your participation and my intention to retain your anonymity and the confidentiality of all data. We will examine the contents of the Informed Consent Form prior to your signing it and the interview. In addition, I will appreciate your sending me a copy of your vita in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope prior to the interview so I will be more familiar with your background. As a means of introduction, I have enclosed a brief biographical data sheet.

If you need to reach me for any reason prior to the interview, please contact me at 313.255.3299 or send an e-mail message to me at mdowning@emich.edu.

Sincerely,
Minta Downing
Enclosures
## Appendix I

### Mandated Training for Local School Board Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Mandated by State</th>
<th>Mandated by Other Local Entities</th>
<th>Other Approved Providers Listed</th>
<th>Mandated Training Provided by Other Providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The table above lists states where mandated training for local school board members is provided. The table includes states where the training is mandated by the state, mandated by other local entities, and other approved providers listed.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>State School Boards Association</th>
<th>Other Approved Providers</th>
<th>&quot;Other Approved Providers&quot; Listed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>State Public Education Department and others as approved by NMSBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>State department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>New School Board Members Only</td>
<td>New and Veteran School Bd. Members</td>
<td>Does the training include any mandated topics?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes -- duties and responsibilities of board members, school finance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes -- 1. Financial Training 2. Training for the Delaware Performance Appraisal System (for evaluating the superintendent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes -- New board members must have training in school finance and Superintendent Evaluation. Veteran BOE members must get 6 hours of training, but no particular topic is required.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes -- governance, curriculum, trends in education, open meetings, public records</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes -- Freedom of Access laws (the only requirement)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes -- leadership, roles and responsibilities, collective bargaining, finance, open meeting and public records law, ethics statues and conflict of interest laws, collective bargaining</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Yes -- school finance and management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>New School Board Members Only</td>
<td>New and Veteran School Bd. Members</td>
<td>Does the training include any mandated topics?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — governance rules, board/supt. relationship, school law, finance, goal-setting, policy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — Orientation: The School Ethics Act, roles and responsibilities, superintendent evaluation; Second and Third Years: Governance; Re-elected or Re-appointed: School Law Update.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — training that explains state public education department rules, policies and procedures, statutory powers and duties of local school boards, legal concepts pertaining to public schools, finance and budget and other matters deemed relevant by the department.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — New York State has 6 hours of mandatory fiscal oversight training for all newly elected board members. This training must be completed with a board member's first year of board service.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — For new: school finance, Open Meeting/Open Records Act, new laws impacting education, ethics, duties, responsibilities of board members, legal issues impacting local school districts, school employment and due process law, IDEA instruction, other education issues.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — Roles, legal, superintendent relations, procedures, budget, employee relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — board/superintendent relations, advocacy, board policy and operations, vision, finance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — education code update after legislative sessions; team-building each year with supt., 3 hours; Open Meetings Act, 1 hour, soon after election.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes — 1. personnel 2. curriculum 3. current issues in education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6  14
### Training Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>Newly elected board members have 15 months to acquire 9 hours of training. Incumbent board members must receive 6 hours per year thereafter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>The two mandated training components are one-time requirements for all board members. All other training is voluntary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>New Board Members -- 12 hours within first year; veteran members required to get 6 hours per year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>Board members with 0-3 years of service are required to receive 12 hours of training a year, 8 of which must be received through the Kentucky School Boards Association. Members with 4 - 7 years of experience are required to receive 8 hours a year (through any source they choose) and members with 8 years of experience or more must receive 4 hours of training a year (through any source they choose).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>6 hours per year for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>Two hours of training on the details of the Maine Freedom of Access statues, once during each term of office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>8 hours of orientation for members elected initially after 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Minnesota Statute 123B.09, subdivision 2 provides as follows: &quot;School Board Member Training. A member shall receive training in school finance and management developed in consultation with the Minnesota School Boards Association and consistent with section 127A.29. The school boards association must make available to each newly elected school board member training in school finance and management consistent with section 127A.19 within 180 days of that member taking office. The program shall be developed in consultation with the department and appropriate representatives of higher education.&quot; Minnesota Statute 127A.19 which is referenced twice in this law refers to the obligation of the department of education to make available to school districts and individual school sites assistance and training in financial management including such topics as financial reporting, accounting and financial operations, long-term financial planning, district and school level expenditure and revenue budgeting, capital budget planning, and the development of a model reporting system for school sites for resource use and outcome achievement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>New Board Members -- 12 hours within the first 6 months of service. Other board members -- 6 hours yearly. Board members in low performing school districts -- additional 6 hours in &quot;Improving Student Outcomes.&quot; Board members in districts with financial problems -- additional 6 hours in school finance. MSTA provides all training by law.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Training Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>16 hours of instruction for all newly elected or appointed board members within one year of election or appointment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>Orientation: one-day or weekend option; Second and Third Year and Re-elected or Re-appointed: 2-hour orientation: in-person; One-day: Lecture; Weekend: Lecture, breakout groups, and clinics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>The current training required in New Mexico is five hours per year. Training is provided by the NM Public Education Department or New Mexico School Boards Association or any other entity approved by both NMPED and NMSBA. Training levels are either basic or advanced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>See previous comments. Six hours of training is required. Board members only need to take this training once.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>12 clock hours annually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Training takes place over one day. There is a seminar for new board members and one for experienced board members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>New: 12 hours within 15 months of election in areas listed in #4. Incumbent: 6 hours within 15 months of election in areas listed in #4. All: In addition, all members must receive 3 hours per year per term of service. Most have 15 hours in 5-year terms; some have 3-yr and some 4-yr terms. The information can be from any state dept. of education approved training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Six hours for new board members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>New board members in their first year of service attend a two-day orientation (14 hours) and one core module (7 hours). Veteran board members attend one module annually.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>&quot;Effective July 1, 1988, each local school board shall require its members to participate annually in in-service programs on personnel, curriculum and current issues in education as part of their service on the local board.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>How is training for local school board members funded in your state?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Funded by State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Maine School Management Assoc. provides it as part of dues, or it is included in conference registration.

We charge up to $25 for food - always optional.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>How is training for local school board members funded in your state?</th>
<th>What type of fee structure is used to pay for the training?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>State grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Training is provided at all conferences with fees included in conference registration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Flat fee combined with specialized fees for specific training in district.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Funded by</th>
<th>Local School</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>We offer some training through a state grant also.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Combination of local and state</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Any cost is carried in the school district budget as an expense; state or local funds could be used; some training can be found without charge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>|          | 2 | 14 | 7 | 10 | 2 | 8 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>If yes, what happens to boards/members who don’t comply with the training requirements?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>School districts must list in their annual report the number of training hours received by each board member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Letter from DOE is sent to district informing superintendent that the BOE member did not get training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>The Kentucky state board of education has the option to remove a board member if they do not comply with the training hour mandate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Member names are listed on LSBA website for public examination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Certificate of Attendance is provided to local city and town clerk. No sanctions apply for non-attendees, which is unusual for a state with an otherwise punitive culture. There is, however, political fallout for candidates who are attacked by opponents for not attending. Seats have been lost over this issue. No one goes to school board jail, however.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Removed from office by the Attorney General.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>If yes, what happens to boards/members who don’t comply with the training requirements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>The State Ethics Commission can recommend suspension or removal from the board. The Commissioner of Education makes the final decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Board members who attend the required number of hours (5) will be reported as setting standards in the School District Report Card issued by the State Department of Education. Those who receive twenty (20) hours or more, will be reported as exemplary. As per state law, those board members who fail to attend five (5) hours will be reported in the School District Report Card as having failed to meet standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>New York State board members are required to take an oath of office and faithfully discharge the duties and uphold the law. The Commissioner of Education may remove a member for non-compliance. To date, no board member has been removed for not taking the mandatory course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>If a new member does not get the 12 hours within 15 months of election, their seat is declared vacant. If a member does not get the hours within the term, they are not eligible for re-election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>If board members do not comply, the Commissioner of Education can remove them from office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Annually, at the meeting at which the call for board member elections is scheduled, the board president shall announce the name of each board member who has completed the required continuing education, who has exceeded the required hours of continuing education, and who is deficient in completing the required training. The meeting minutes will reflect this information and the information shall be made available to the local media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>The superintendent is required to certify that the board met the training requirement each year in the Superintendent’s Annual Report to the State Department of Education. Technically the state Attorney General’s office could initiate removal, but that has never happened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>