

## Experiences of African American Superintendents in Texas

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### ABSTRACT

The topic of African American superintendents has been largely neglected in society. Research studies revealed that an underrepresentation of African American superintendents exists. This ethnic disparity is a valid concern. This study was based on the premise that additional research studies are needed to understand the climate, culture and leadership experiences of African American superintendents in Texas. Although African American men and women are pursuing careers in the superintendency, there is still a shortage of available research data that explores their experiences. This basic interpretive qualitative research study explored the overall experiences and perceptions of six African American superintendents in Texas. In-depth, semi-structured interviews provided rich, thick descriptions, feelings and an interpretive perspective of this purposive and snowball sampling. The researcher served as the instrument to data collection. The method of triangulation was employed to ensure trustworthiness, credibility and member checking where the participants confirmed that the data were interpreted correctly by the researcher to improve the quality of the research. This study contributed new knowledge from an African American perspective. Social Cognitive Theory was the theoretical framework for this qualitative study (Bandura, 1986; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The results of this investigation reflected the personal experiences, views and perceptions of six African-American superintendents as they obtained their desired positions. The findings revealed there were some barriers and challenges facing aspiring African American superintendents: (a) lack of networking, (b) lack of mentors, (c) lack of school district pool of potential African American candidates and (d) lack of professional educational and equity associations. Recommendations that resulted from this investigation included that as aspiring African American superintendents, they must learn to develop professional and personal network of contacts. As aspiring African American superintendents seek superintendent positions, they need to research the demographics, culture and needs of the district, stakeholders and board members. Finally, professional educational associations need to be inclusive and expand their membership pool to include underrepresented African American educators.

Keywords: Superintendent, African American, Leadership

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## INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study investigates six African American superintendents and obtains an improved comprehension of the perceptions and experiences of African American superintendents. Chapter I contains an overview of research as a foundation for this study. It describes the overview of the investigation, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions that guided this study, the theoretical framework, significance, assumptions and limitations of the investigation.

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The goal of this investigation was to explore and interpret (Dillard, 1995) the overall experiences, perceptions and leadership experiences and practices of six African American superintendents in the state of Texas school districts.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1.How do African American superintendents in Texas describe their overall experiences regarding climate, culture and leadership?
- 2.How do African American superintendents in Texas successfully navigate the path to the superintendency?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature examines the vital concepts, characteristics and necessary dimensions of African American superintendents as leaders, and the overall phenomena in this naturalistic inquiry qualitative study as a means of successful reform. This research study was timely and of current importance in understanding the climate, culture and leadership perceptions of six African American superintendents in order to gain a better understanding of the issues that contributed to and or hampered their ascent to the superintendency, in an attempt to expand the number of African American superintendents in Texas.

### Historical Perspective

Superintendents as a teacher-scholar was dominant from 1865 to 1910 (Spring, as cited in Smothers, 2012). They functioned as lead educators who were subordinate to board members but were considered superior to principals, teachers and students (Kowalski, 2006). The superintendent as a business manager emerged after 1910. Some school boards placed more emphasis on a superintendent's managerial skill than they did on his or her teaching skills. Prior to this time, there were neither courses nor academic degrees offered in educational administration (Cubberly, 1924).

### Minority Representation

The United States of America has faced a significant shift in demographics and population over the past 20 years. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the numbers and

diversity in the U.S. population will continue to grow, especially among minority students. The racial composition of superintendents, teachers and student populations appears to be facing the same changes but at a much slower increase (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). The President of the Association of California School Administrators (2008) advocated that “it is important to address the needs of African American education leaders and students because we want all members of our society to achieve” (para. 8). A disparity in the number of superintendents in districts where the majority of the population consists of minority African American and Hispanic students creates a serious setback in the success of these students (Campbell, 2015). Domenech, Executive Director of the School Superintendents Association, stated, “we are nowhere near representing the population that is in our schools” (as cited in Campbell, 2015, para 4). He further stated that “these students need role models. When they see a brown or black face walk into their classroom, especially as the superintendent, they think and say ‘wow’ that could be me” (Domenech, as cited in Campbell, 2015, para. 4). According to Carpenter and Diem (2014), as of today, African American superintendents continue to struggle for employment in districts. Educational theorists have stated that not unlike the principal, the superintendent’s impact on learning is facilitated through the establishment of climate and culture and the direct impact of the district/school. Therefore, having superintendent populations reflective of the population of the district is the key to learning and student achievement. As noted by Bandura (1986), equitable representation ensures students will identify and model themselves after other successful educators, mentors and superintendents.

### **Significant Research Studies**

Research inquires have been conducted concerning various aspects of the school superintendent over the previous years. *The American School Superintendent: 2010 Decennial Study* (Kowalski et al., 2011) is an expansion with inquires that have been organized every 10 years and was developed in 1923. However, there were matters that were the main points of specific time epochs such as the 1933 investigation that included the role that public schools would have in changing economic and social expansion after the Great Depression. The 1952 investigation concentrated on the difference between urban and rural superintendents. The 1960 investigation concentrated on superintendent readiness, and the 1971 investigation included around 100 questions about attributes of the position, the individuals in the position and the school districts employing them. The NABSE (2011) mentioned that there are around 13,893 school districts in the United States. Nevertheless, only 361 or 2.5% are African American male and female superintendents. Ethnicity of the superintendency appears not to be a thing similar to that of the population of students and teachers those superintendents serve and supervise (Volp, 2001).

### **Leadership Practices**

As leaders of change, school leaders must therefore engage strategies favorable to comprehensive practices among the elements such as shared vision, collaboration and effective support, to play a central role (Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). It is imperative that school leaders participate in a balancing act where issues of improving achievement, equity and social justice are on the front lines of their agenda (Devecchi & Nevin, 2010). However, school leaders regardless of ethnicity are evaluated by what they do. According to Boyatzies and McKee

(2005), successful African American school leaders of change are “resonant leaders” who inspire their stakeholders to recognize a problem and find solutions to solve it. When school leaders are able to innovate, they are able to achieve transformative changes (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Heifetz (1994) stated that the most important benefit of a leader is the capacity to achieve an activity where conflicts due to competing perspectives are addressed. Nevertheless, school leaders must “engage people in facing a challenge, adjusting their values, changing their perspectives, and developing new habits” (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p. 134).

### **Successful Leadership**

According to Vargo (2005), the terms “visionary,” “integrity,” “academic excellence,” “bridge builder,” and “understanding of different cultures” (p. 2) are some of the major attributes that are necessary to becoming a successful and effective superintendent. According to Kirst (1993), a successful superintendent has an intellectual image of what exceptional instruction is and is aware of how to accomplish schedules that will enhance teaching and learning. The majority of the studies on the responsibilities of the superintendent furnish unclear suggestions of successful leadership attributes. Therefore, leadership styles are not linked to district or student achievements. However, a successful educational leader can occur in all ethnicities, dimensions, age groups and mentalities. Differences are discovered when one looks at two particular physical attributes of educational leaders: gender and race. The Texas Education Agency (2015) stated that student populations across the state are 51.8% Hispanic, 29.4% Anglo, 12.7% African American and 3.7% Asian. Texas has 1,025 school districts, of which 27 are African American superintendents and 7 are female African American.

### **Current Trends**

Currently, the issues of African American men in school leadership may seem somewhat outdated. These concerns are placed in the far parts of our minds because we are now dealing with other important things such as social issues, at-risk students and reduced resources. a successful superintendent is able to have a political acuity that includes being able to handle and balance contradictory interests, guiding school boards and community stakeholders, clear dialoguing, sharing credit with others, accountability and knowing how to negotiate among different community stakeholders and ethnicities. Superintendents should be able to handle complicated organizations, insist on high standards, maintain financial integrity and recognize the power of expertise and capability of staff and position them in employment where they will be more effective and successful.

### **Role of the Superintendent**

Superintendents serve as board CEOs on educational affairs and as district educational leaders. They are accountable for assuring the school board is notified concerning district business, activities and district requirements. They create administrative plans required to supervise district day-to-day business properly and in agreement with board policy. These procedures must be in compliance with all laws, rules and regulations that pertain to the district (Reeves, 2009).

Six superintendent standards and excellence are required to ensure student success:

1. Setting a wide-shared vision for learning;
2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;
3. Ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources;
5. Acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner;
6. Understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts. (Council of Chief School Officers, 2008, p. 19)

### **Leadership, Learning, and Gender Development**

In an effort to develop successful predictors to leadership, Evers and Lakomski (1991) divided organizational leadership into three sections: (a) the behavioral scientific approach, (b) the scientific management and (c) the human relations approach. The origin of this system was first addressed as early as 1918 and as late as 1945. They have evolved into other major theories. Kowalski's (2006) book, *The School Superintendent: Theory, Practice and Cases*, provides answers to questions about the superintendency by providing personal experiences, theory and practical knowledge to encourage others.

Shakeshaft (as cited in Bandura, 1986) claimed that in general, men and women's approaches or attitudes toward the position of school administrator were different. "As a group, women tend to have a different administrative style than men do and that effectiveness for a female may depend on this altered approach" (Shakeshaft, as cited in Bandura, 1986, p. 190).

Bandura (1986) maintained that new behaviors were learned. The type of learning was one of the essential procedures by which cognitive competencies were initiated and diversified. "Sex-typing is promoted through a vast system of socialization practices beginning at birth, with infants clothed in pink or blue apparel depending on their sex" (Bandura, 1989, p. 33). Eagly's (1987) social role theory confirmed Bandura's (1986) theory and claimed that the expectations and the roles that society generally assigned to men were definitely different than those assigned to women. Merriam and Brockett (1997) maintained that the lack of access and training affected women's learning in adulthood. This is important because the lack of training placed women in a disadvantaged position when seeking promotion. However, the literature is not consistent. Merriam and Brockett (1997) revealed that African American female superintendents were more qualified and better trained than their male counterparts. Additional research studies according to Shakeshaft (1989) attributed the underrepresentation of women superintendents to societal norms and beliefs regarding leadership were not necessarily a result of their inexperience or lack of training. These studies revealed that women are experienced and well trained. Yet, a disparity still exists in the workforce; there were only seven African American women superintendents in Texas out of the 1,025 districts.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND APPROACH**

### **Research Design**

This investigation was a naturalistic inquiry with prominence on crucial subjects (Creswell, 2003). According to Baxter and Jack (2008), the methodology of a qualitative study implements instruments for researchers to investigate a convoluted phenomenon within its setting. Therefore, when this method is done accurately, it transforms into a vital process. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), a qualitative study has its concentration of significance, discoveries and explanation; its theories are centered with the removal and explanation of significant knowledge. Thus, researchers bring their attention in the interests, events or single motives (Creswell, 2005).

A qualitative investigation is a parasol theory topping several designs of investigations that will allow the researcher to comprehend the significance of a social phenomenon with brief disruptions of the normal surroundings (Merriam, 1998). In naturalistic inquiry, the interviews will think about purposeful discussions (Dexter, 1970; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Terkel, 1972). The motive was to introduce a candid dialogue between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, this investigation brings specific attention to the perceptions of six African American superintendents as they communicate problems of climate, culture and leadership within their districts.

A methodology for setting this investigation involved two steps: (a) categorizing and revising the information into manageable folders and (b) composing a narrative that relates a story (Patton, 2002). As applied to the qualitative investigation (Efeoglu, Ilerten, & Basal, 2018) the information gathered for this consisted of six interviews, observations, field notes and documents. Every piece of data gathered provided rich details that impacted and nevertheless formed each participant's investigation.

### **Setting, Population/Participants**

The criterion-based sampling procedures were utilized to determine the district site for this investigation. The process of participant selection was involved soliciting six African American superintendents using the purposive and snowballing sampling methods in different districts in the state of Texas. The setting for interviews, field notes, observations and documents were the superintendents' respective district offices.

### **Data Collection, Coding, and Analysis**

The six African American superintendents served as data sources for this qualitative study. Data was generated by the six superintendents through interviews, observation, field notes and documents. In a naturalistic inquiry, interviews assist the researcher to understand and seek circumstances of the interpersonal, social and ethnic features of the environment (Fetterman, 1989). The researcher selects questions that allow the participants to reflect on their experiences and explain to the researcher what is going on in the participants' worlds (Merriam, 1998). The superintendents who were interviewed for this study focused on the questions drawn by the researcher (Appendix B). Field notes were utilized to confirm and nullify the interview information method. After deciding the patterns and themes that emerge from the 10 interview

questions, the researcher reviewed and contemplated each concept and sought to determine whether the researcher had seen the same themes in the documents. The last stage of the data collection is the gathering and evaluating of the district records. The requested documents were included the mission and vision statements, goal statements, district-wide assessment plans, district enrollment, demographics and information from the district stakeholders. Responses from participants were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were coded for key words and phrases. The information was read multiple times to ensure understanding. The information and location of each interview was recorded. All of the reactions by the researcher were documented in the researcher's field notes. All transcripts were coded by emerging themes. Data analysis was utilized to prepare and categorize the information obtained. However, the interview information was decreased into themes through a process of coding, condensing, synthesizing and interpreting. All interviews were tape recorded with a digital voice recorder. Every participant voice recording was downloaded onto a compact disc, checked for clarity and transcribed. The framework for this investigation was the focal point for managing the information. The information was examined for the conclusion of this investigation that filled the gap and contributed to the body of knowledge by providing the climate, culture and leadership experiences, perception and feelings of six successful African American superintendents in Texas. Thus, data analysis began with the first interview and continued to the sixth interview, until the research project was completed. Field notes were maintained by the researcher and read and reviewed on a consistent basis throughout the entirety of the project. After each one-hour interview, the taped responses were transcribed verbatim in a Microsoft Word and Excel documents. This study allowed a template inquiry strategy (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), meaning that a particular group of pre-determined codes was used to theme the information. The six participants provided numerous options such as (a) open-coding, (b) axial coding and (c) selective coding. Columns were generated using attributes as categories to assist the information. The common themes and patterns were derived from the data obtained from the interviews, field notes, observations and documents, while being positioned in the relevant qualitative categories. The categories and themes were generated to specifically examine the large amounts of data by a series of editing and crosschecks (Huberman & Miles, 1994). To increase the trustworthiness of this investigation, three strategies were utilized: (a) triangulation (Rolson, 2018; Seale, 1999; & Tracy, 2010) (b) member checking and (c) rich thick description. However, it entails the use of collaborating conformation from a variety of sources to shed light on a theme of perspective (Creswell, 2007).

## **RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

This basic interpretive qualitative research study explored the overall experiences and perceptions of six African American superintendents in Texas. In-depth, semi-structured interviews provided rich, thick descriptions, feelings and an interpretive perspective of this purposive and snowball sampling.

## **Descriptive Data**

Naturalistic qualitative data collection methods were utilized in this study to assess the six participants' perceptions and experiences as African American superintendents and how this affected their ascension to the position of superintendent in the state of Texas. This qualitative research was inherently multidimensional; therefore, multiple forms of data were collected throughout this study (Trochim, 2006). The data also included interviews, observations, field notes and documents collected from the participants beginning in 2015 and through to 2016. Obtaining a variety of data allowed a triangulation approach, permitting the researcher to recognize themes consistent with the study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This investigation examined their perceptions and leadership experiences, along with their vision toward equity concerning positions within the state and their description on how they navigated to, and remained in, the superintendency across the state. The significance of these African American superintendents' navigation to and continuation in their position is to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning their underrepresentation in the superintendent position within Texas and the United States (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Tillman, 2009).

## **Participants**

The study consisted of six participants: two females and four male African American superintendents. All six participants were Texas certified at the doctorate degree level. The superintendents had varying years of experience, in and out of the state of Texas. The participants were given pseudonyms to disguise their identity. Participants were introduced individually as participants A, B, C, D, E, and F. There were 28 African American superintendents in Texas during the time of this study.

## **Superintendent A**

Superintendent A appeared most confident causing him to stand out from the other superintendents interviewed. Superintendent A is an African American male. He has served as a superintendent since June 2009. He became a superintendent at the age of 37. He received his undergraduate degree in 1994, his master's degree in 1996 and his doctoral degree in 1998. He has served in an education capacity as an elementary teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, and assistant superintendent of curriculum. The school district went from Low Performing to Recognized status under his superintendency. The district has made substantial progress in student achievement under his leadership. Dr. A is in an urban school district in South Texas with a student enrollment of 25,000, more than 10,000; 99.4% of the students were Hispanic, 0.1% were African American and 0.4% were Caucasian. This was Superintendent A's seventh year as a superintendent.

### **Superintendent B**

Superintendent B was very polite, courteous and professional with strong confidence. Dr. B began her career as a middle school 8th grade English language arts classroom teacher in 1999. After three years, she became an assistant principal and served for two years, next she became a principal at an intermediate level campus, and then moved into the principalship in the same middle school she served as a classroom teacher and assistant principal. Eventually, she was approached with the possibility of applying for superintendent and was offered the position. She served as a superintendent in the small district for five years before becoming superintendent in her present district where she has served for the last three years. Dr. B was a female superintendent of an urban school district in East Texas with a student enrollment of 8,322, less than 10,000; 29.0% of the students were African American, 39.3% were Hispanic and 27.7% were Caucasian. This was Superintendent B's fifth year as a superintendent.

### **Superintendent C**

Superintendent C was amendable, with a quick wit and a sharp sense of purpose. Dr. C began his educational leadership experience as the principal of a middle school for four years and then served three years as the principal of a high school. He served as a superintendent for three years, three years as superintendent in another district, one year as a deputy superintendent and presently completing eight years as a superintendent. Dr. C was a male superintendent of an urban school district in South Central Texas with a student population of 23,771, more than 20,000; 55% of the students were Hispanic, 26.8% were African American, 16.4% were Caucasian, and 1.8% Asian and 1% were Asian/Pacific Islanders. This was Dr. C's eighth year as a superintendent.

### **Superintendent D**

Superintendent D was very open, honest and willing to share his perception and personal experiences. Superintendent D began his educational experience as a 6th grade math classroom teacher for four years before entering administration. His second position was an assistant principal for five years and then as a high school principal for two years. After applying for several jobs in the same school district and not getting them, he decided to pursue other things. He was hired in another district where he was an assistant principal at the high school for one year. After a year, he became the principal at the high school and served for five years. After learning that the superintendent was retiring, the superintendent asked Superintendent D whether he was interested in the job. The board offered him the position of superintendent and he accepted it. He entered the superintendency with no central office experience. He is swerving in his seventh year as superintendent. Dr. D was a male superintendent of an urban school district in South Central Texas with a student enrollment of 1,054, less than 10,000; 16.4% of the students were African American, 27.1% were Hispanic, 41.0% were Caucasian, 1% were Native American and 4.4% were Asian/Pacific Islanders. Dr. D was serving in his sixth year as a superintendent.

### **Superintendent E**

Superintendent E was intense, focused and self-assured throughout the interview, answering questions and responding to the questions with clarity and conciseness. Dr. E's leadership experience began as a high school assistant principal where he served for two years in the ninth grade and two years in a middle school serving as an assistant principal. He elevated to principal at the middle school level with the assistance of a mentor, then to high school principal where he served for four years. He relocated to a different state as assistant superintendent primarily responsible for secondary schools and chief negotiator with the unions, community and all other entities that engage with the district. He then relocated back to Texas and became the district superintendent where he has served for the last six years. Dr. E was a male superintendent of an urban school district in North Central Texas with a student enrollment of 6,536, less than 10,000; 75% of the students were African American, 18% were Hispanic and 3% Caucasian. This was Dr. E's seventh year as a superintendent.

### **Superintendent F**

Superintendent F was a female who is soft-spoken and reserved in demeanor, and she answered questions concisely. She shared some personal experiences encountered as she sought a position in the superintendency. She began her leadership experience as an elementary principal where she served for four years, then moved to another district as principal at another elementary school, where she served for three years. She decided to move to another district as a middle school principal for three years. Her promotion to the assistant superintendent position relocated her to another district where she served for five years. Her accession to the superintendency took her to yet another district where she served for five years. Dr. F was a superintendent in a new district where she has served for the last three years. Dr. F was a female superintendent of an urban school district in Northeast Texas with a student enrollment of 1,971, less than 10,000; 29.6% of the students were African American, 40.95 were Hispanic and 25.1% were Caucasian. This was Dr. F's fifth year as a superintendent.

### **Emergent Themes**

Therefore, after reviewing the participants' interview transcripts, field notes and documents, five prevalent themes emerge:

1. Ascension to the superintendency
2. Barriers and challenges
3. Leadership
4. Networking
5. Mentoring

The data gathered from the six interviews were examined and scrutinized. The procedure involved living with the data, constantly comparing new patterns and themes as they emerged. The procedure was completed when repetition and saturation of the data revealed new information. This segment will deliberate each of the five emerging themes.

## Ascension to the Superintendency

Data revealed that the participants shared similar attitudes, beliefs, values and personal experiences that were instrumental during the ascension and prior to obtaining the position of superintendent. It was understandable from the information obtained that each of the superintendents believed that their professional positions and educational background assisted in their preparation for the superintendency. The prior positions that they held propelled them forward with experiences that would provide valuable insight into the superintendency. Their educational experiences afforded them the opportunity to gain knowledge that would be essential to the success of the superintendent's role.

Superintendent A was a high school principal recruited for two different leadership positions in the Central Office. However, Superintendent A decided early in his career to pursue his goal of becoming a superintendent:

This has been a focused effort . . . fast track and I knew I wanted to be a superintendent. I established my goal right out of college just because I wanted to be Dr. A ever since becoming a teacher . . . I was 37 years old when I became a Superintendent.

Superintendent A believed that the experiences and positions he held in education allowed him to hone his leadership skills.

Superintendent B knew why she wanted to be a superintendent. "There is no question, whatsoever, from anyone, any district, or any campus in which I've served that I'm all about kids." She was anxious, well prepared and knew the obstacles she was facing as a female and as an African American in order to become a superintendent.

Many superintendents ascend to the superintendent's position in divergent ways. Superintendent C was approached to apply for the position because of serious stability issues with that particular position.

I believe I was promoted because of my work ethic and the belief of others in my abilities and my passion to educate. My greatest assets are having a good belief system, good morals, good ethics and good leadership skills; and the fact that I use prior leadership experience to help kids excel.

## Challenges and Barriers

Common challenges and barriers were revealed as the data was uncovered such as ethnicity, stereo-typing and lack of leadership opportunities. In addition, establishing a network and getting connected to organizations that "can see your potential to move through and up the following the policies and procedures when some stakeholders are used to the "good old boy's system" and operating according to "how business has always been done."

Traditionally, African-American superintendents simply were few and far in between; therefore, these superintendents feel that they have to "pave the way". Superintendent D stated: Sometimes the opportunity is not always present for African American superintendents, because people are just not used to African Americans in high leadership positions. Superintendent F expressed, "another great challenge is breaking barriers in districts and organizations that have not had a history with African American leaders in top administration." Throughout reviewing

all of the data, the barriers of race kept rising to the surface. Superintendent A stated that ethnicity is the greatest challenge African American candidates face in advancing to the position of superintendent.

Stereotyping is a definite barrier in becoming a superintendent in many districts. The idea that African Americans are not an appropriate fit for the superintendent positions is very prevalent in many public school districts . . . would like to think it's not stereotyping, but statistics report that 95% of the superintendent positions across the state are held by Anglo Americans and they are usually paid more compared to individuals of other races.

Superintendent B appeared to revert to the disadvantage of being an African-American, "The big challenge for African American superintendents is to be twice as good because all eyes are always on you," and "for leaders of color, there is no room for deviation, no forgiveness, no anything." She added that once an African-American does succeed in obtaining a superintendent job then, "We are under a huge microscope".

That data suggests reciprocal preconceived stereotypes. The majority of superintendents in Texas are white, African-Americans are not given the opportunities to advance and this presents a trust issue with both ethnicities. Superintendent D feels that he is always trying to prove himself whereas non-African-Americans are not confronted with this challenge on the same level. In addition, the issue of trust arose with regard to search firms, "An immense barrier to overcome, is relying on the search firm's advisers to be your only communication between yourself and the school board. superintendent candidates, when ethics and trust are not truly present, depend on the advisers to be open, trusting and ethical.

## Leadership

The research showed that leadership occurs in conversations, actions, directives, guidance, procedures and professional development in any district, comes with speedbumps and primary the role is to influence the positive change.

Superintendent A defined superintendent as the Chief Executive Officer of the school district. They coordinate everything within the school system, period. He believed that leadership motivations employed by administrators and leaders were to ensure equality occurs within his district. His experience as an African American and what he knows about other African American leaders are the same. He stated: "It is strength, fortitude and ganas. It's a historical perspective that only African Americans really have."

Superintendent B believes a leader is one who leads and manages all things. "As a leader, I am someone who serves in the capacity of superintendent I am always leading. Leadership is someone who sets the course and provides the vision. It's almost a ministry that changes lives literally." She is passionate about what she does as a leader:

As a teacher, I taught students. If it had not been for a teacher, you wouldn't be interviewing me today because education is what changed the total trajectory of my life. Superintendents paint a vision and convey the fact that all students can learn with the assistance of teachers, principals and other leaders.

Superintendent C believes leadership is about kids exceling and hiring the best teachers. A superintendent is “a manager, an instructional leader,” and “it’s not about teaching African American kids; it’s about teaching every kid.

### **Networking**

A fourth emergent theme was discovered from this investigation. The majority of the superintendents interviewed believed that networking was important in their obtaining of a superintendent position, not only the superintendency but also for any of their educational positions. Therefore, all six superintendents expressed through their responses how their informal connections were vital in learning about available positions and in getting their current positions. A superintendent alluded that the *good old boy* network was still pertinent in getting a position; however, the informal networking that comes from connecting with others in administration and through professional organizations and connectivity with search consultants or recruiters is still how the majority of them learned about available positions. Superintendent A commented:

The good old boy network is still prevalent. However, organizations like the Texas Association of School Boards, Texas Association of School Administrators, and Texas Association of Secondary School Principals are excellent organizations that will help people make the needed contacts . . . . If anyone is going to be a superintendent, you have to have contacts.

Superintendent B was approached with the possibility of applying for a superintendent position and was offered the position with the assistance of networking:

So, we’ve got to continue to provide support to work in professional communities and networks and make sure that we support each other. It is of great importance and wise to belong to organizations such as TABSE and NABSE organizations. These are excellent organizations that will help people make the needed connections. Therefore, if you are aspiring to be a superintendent, get involved.

She highly recommended that aspiring professionals have to be advocates for themselves and continue to apply for jobs. “If you see an advertisement for a job, apply for it, sell yourself and allow people to know what you have to offer and that you have an interest in those positions.”

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring is important because it serves as the socialization for the success of aspiring superintendents. Without the proper mentorship, aspiring African American administrators will find it problematic to advance their careers. According to the preliminary research, the focus concerning National Alliance of Black Educators (NABSE) and Texas Alliance of Black School Educators (TABSE) was the concentration of statistics concerning the number of African American superintendents in Texas. Superintendent A stated, “After the interviews, it became apparent that the majority of networking and position opportunities for all African American superintendents in Texas was created from these two organizations.” The research devised by the

NABSE (2014), African American superintendents usually focused on the number of superintendents employed nationwide and in Texas. All of the six participants interviewed stated they had a very strong relationship with these two organizations and have been mentored by and provided mentorships from being members of the organization.

Superintendent D believes that mentoring is definitely a challenge. “I think probably the biggest challenge is getting your name and who you are out there so people get to know what you can do.”

Superintendent B is committed to being there for others as a mentor. She had a professor who encouraged, and inspired her:

So, in return, I am doing those things, and I am committed to doing what was done for me. A mentor is one who shares the different opportunities and encourages you to try and apply for a position. I think many times what I’ve seen, since being in the position and encouraging others, they think like I thought that you had to have this experience and this pathway.

She feels she is the exception; she is the reality of the hard work that her many teachers, principals and others who believed in her and the power of education. She stated: “Because of that, I owe it – I have to pay it forward.”

Superintendent F’s question is: How can she assist other African American superintendents who want to lead in the state of Texas? She stated, “Be a great mentor, be transparent, be open, be available to communicate, be honest and positive about the job because it’s a great responsibility.”

The superintendents in this investigation understood the importance of networking and mentoring each other and how it advanced the profession. Many job opportunities are communicated through word of mouth; therefore, many aspiring superintendents are in a better opportunity and belong to a network and have mentors.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This investigation was limited to six African American superintendents who were currently serving as superintendents in Texas. The results of this investigation reflected the personal experiences, views and perceptions of those six African American superintendents and how they obtained their desired positions. The purpose for this investigation was to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning African Americans in the Caucasian, male-dominated educational position of superintendents. The findings revealed there are barriers and challenges facing aspiring African American superintendents that include the following: (a) the lack of networking, (b) lack of mentors, (c) school district need to widen their pool of potential candidates by reaching out to African American professionals and (d) professional educational organizations and (equity) associations and districts need to reach out more and mentor aspiring African American candidates. By networking and mentoring, it can assist African Americans in obtaining educational positions. Professional educational organizations need to be inclusive and expand their membership pool to include aspiring African Americans in gaining access to the superintendency. The study revealed school districts need to widen their pool of potential candidates by reaching out to more African American superintendents.

After reviewing the literature and findings from this investigation on African American superintendents, it is the researcher's opinion that additional research is needed in some areas. Aspiring African American professional educators could greatly benefit from the potential valuable information in obtaining an improved comprehension of the perceptions and experiences of African American superintendents and how they affected their ascension to the superintendency. With the information garnered from this investigation, it is the hope of this researcher that it could lead to more African Americans ascending to the superintendency.

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