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An examination of research findings on the perception of a precipitous de-
cline in the quantity and quality of superintendent applicants was under-
taken by leading scholars in the field and is reported in two consecutive
issues of the *Journal of School Leadership*. We trust that this authoritative
body of work adds to the knowledge base, informs the national debate, and
will guide policy deliberations in the coming years. The intent of the au-
thors of this brief end piece is to reflect on empirical findings as well as to
introduce a number of provocative scholarly observations that will hope-
fully elevate and focus future policy debates.

Policymakers, practitioners, professors, and heads of professional asso-
ciations are engaged in a heated debate about whether there is a crisis in
the superintendency. This debate, by and large, is being driven by wide-
spread perceptions of declining numbers and quality of individuals in su-
perintendent search pools and is raising concern as to who will lead school
districts in the coming decade. A number of analysts are concerned that if
the claims supporting the rhetoric of a crisis in the field go unchallenged,
it will create an atmosphere in which policymakers will be compelled to
offer simplistic solutions to problems that don't exist.

The intent of convening a group of eminent scholars in the field of edu-
cational administration for this special issue of the *Journal of School*

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Leadership (the last two articles for this "issue" conclude the preceding May 2003 issue of the *Journal*) was to juxtapose claims that the numbers and quality of individuals in superintendent pools is inadequate with empirical evidence of recent national and state studies. The scholars whose work appears in these issues unequivocally conclude that a nationwide crisis in the superintendency does not exist. Rather, superintendents in general appear to be highly satisfied with their current positions, stay longer, and retire later than during previous decades (Björk, Keedy, & Gurley, 2003; Cooper, Fusarelli, & Carelli, 2000; Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). Further, they note that school board presidents, those who have direct knowledge of the availability and qualifications of superintendent candidates in search pools overwhelmingly reject the notion that they have problems with inadequate numbers and qualification of candidates. Over 95% of school board presidents responding to a nationwide survey rate the 1st-year performance of superintendents hired as either very successful (77.5%) or successful (17.6%) (Glass & Björk, 2003).

These scholars, however, are careful to point out that the field has a number of significant problems that must be addressed. These problems contribute to, and help perpetuate, the shortage myth. For example, some districts that "churn" superintendents through their districts have truly abysmally low superintendent tenure rates, capture media attention, and earn reputations as being undesirable places to work (Glass & Björk, 2003). Not surprisingly, these school districts do not attract large applicant pools and thus fuel anecdotal "support" for the existence of a superintendency crisis. A real issue of rancorous school boards creating hostile work environments is often eclipsed by claims of a shortage.

Contributing authors to this special issue note that while the field has several problems, there is reason to be hopeful. Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) found that superintendents who regard their university-based preparation as being seriously deficient is without merit. A recent nationwide study indicates that the vast majority of superintendents (74%) regard their preparation as being "excellent" (26.2%) or "good" (47.4%). Those who have completed programs within the past 5 years rate the quality of their preparation programs higher. Only 3.6% indicated that their preparation was "poor." The major weaknesses identified by superintendents was the lack of preservice hands-on experience (19.8%), inadequate access to technology (18.9%), and failure to link course content to practice (16.5%) (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). These data suggest that rather than eliminating university-based superintendent programs, they should be more embedded in practice.

Universities are being encouraged to reinvent their preparation programs so that the essential knowledge base is organized around problems of practice (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). This offers more opportunity for the kind of collaboration between practitioners and university professors, which the literature currently advocates. Superintendent preparation, in particular, benefits greatly from incumbent superintendents' involvement in programs designed to move away from the traditional static classroom delivery that has been criticized (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000; Kowalski, 2003). One of the best avenues for professional development has always been found in teaching opportunities—superintendents who are involved in the preparation of future superintendents gain energy and renewed enthusiasm for their work by helping to prepare others to step into the role (see Tingley, 2002). As superintendent Stewart Roberson observes about his experiences as an adjunct professor for the University of Virginia:

> The role of a teaching superintendent can lead to self-actualization because it ties together the learning and experiences that so richly define our unique set of responsibilities. If we capitalize on the opportunity that this special role affords us, we can effectively challenge and prepare the next generation of educational leaders. (2002, p. 15)

However, for adjunct work to be most effective, universities must provide guidance and training for superintendents so that their practical knowledge and expertise can be well integrated into curricula based on research and scholarship (Beem, 2002). Students prepared in university programs that offer close ties between practicing administrators and faculty are more likely to meet the "quality" requirements that have surfaced in the literature and the popular press. Quoting Art Levine, Beem (2002) makes the point that schools and colleges of education enrich their offerings for students by using qualified practitioners in the classroom. As the recent issue of *The School Administrator* (November 2002) illustrates, on the whole, universities have responded well to the pressures from the field to become more relevant by hiring incumbent administrators as adjuncts.

Moreover, while some states are lowering or eliminating degree requirements for licensure so that noneducators can fill positions, as Kowalski (2003) points out, the accompanying move toward requiring superintendents to be more capable than ever before; implementing and sustaining complex reforms suggests an enhanced university presence in superintendent preparation. Superintendents and their teams need to be fully informed of up-to-date research and research methods that will give them the necessary district information to respond to the increasing state and federal demands for accountability. Increased emphasis on data-driven decision making and management of information, even for the smallest systems, requires superintendents to have different kinds of conceptual knowledge than were required in the past.

A major challenge for those responsible for superintendent preparation, both within professional organizations and universities, is to help rectify the persistent gender and race imbalance in the profession. The U.S. Census Bureau characterized the superintendency as the most White, male-dominated profession in the nation (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). This succinct picture of the superintendency challenges the profession, policymakers, and local school boards to examine the near absence of women and people of color in the profession and take corrective action.

Feminist scholars of educational administration contend that White women and women of color construct and enact leadership in ways that depart distinctively from their male colleagues (Blackmore, 1999; Capper, 1993; Dillard, 1995; Enomoto, 1995; Grogan, 1996, 1999; Grogan & Smith, 1998; Marshall, 1993, 1997; Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich, 2000; Shakeshaft 1989, 1999; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996, as cited in Larson & Murtadha, 2002). This difference in leadership is important for fostering greater equity. Larson and Murtadha (2002) note that through feminist inquiry, researchers have found that an ethic of care rooted in concerns for relationships rather than roles is vital to caring for children as whole persons. Feminist and critical race scholars have argued convincingly that if educational systems are to foster greater equity, women's ways of understanding and responding to moral dilemmas and civic responsibilities will have to be recognized and valued (Larson & Murtadha, 2002).

Contributing authors confirm what other scholars interested in this problem have consistently found: for whatever historical or societal reasons, there is still a disproportionate number of White males in the superintendency. Brunner (2003) makes the important point that the absence of data collected on gender and race in studies about the position and the dearth of analyses of disaggregated data not only reinforce the problem but also are fundamental problems themselves. There is no shortage of superintendents according to the studies reported in this issue. Therefore, when the popular press makes the cry for more "quality" candidates, most often it is implied that those in the pools lack specific skills or experiences that would be required for the job. Many of those in the pools are women (Edson, 1988; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1999; Tallerico, 2003).

Reporting on the apparent leadership crisis in Iowa, Young (1999) argued that although there might be reasons inherent in the positions for licensed educators to stay away from the principalship and the superintendency, the lack of attention to issues of gender and race is disturbing. Indeed, most states still do not collect data on educational leadership

positions broken down by gender or race, so it is impossible for policymakers to grapple with the issue informed by the relevant statistics. The authors also raise an important question: If data indicate that district size, geographic circumstances, funding adequacy, conflictual school board relations, and a belief held by many school board members that the superintendency is a White male domain contribute to high superintendent turnover and low participation rates of women and people of color in the profession, why do policymakers persist in solving the wrong problems?

Kowalski (2003) discusses the unintended consequences of state early retirement policies and rehire laws. This manipulation of the supply sometimes actually prevents younger or less-experienced superintendent aspirants from accessing the position. In a study of those on Virginia's List of Eligible Superintendents who were not or had never been superintendents, Fenn (2002) found that 100 of the respondents were actively pursuing the position. Eighty-one percent of those had been interviewed but only 8% (16) of the total sample (202) had received job offers. Fenn concludes that the "real" list of candidates for current openings in Virginia, at least over the past few years, had to include current superintendents both from within and outside the state.

Experience suggests that what policymakers believe will influence what they see, how they act, and determine their ultimate success. If they believe that low superintendent tenure rates, inadequate candidate pools, and low quality of applicants are widespread, they will promulgate legislation to solve these particular perceived problems and consequently other problems may be created. If they are mistaken, problems will persist. On the other hand if they examine empirical evidence, they may see a different set of problems than those enmeshed in the rhetoric of crisis and formulate effective legislation. In reviewing empirical evidence that refutes popular misconceptions about the superintendency including, "many are leaving and fewer still are willing to serve," "the quality of applicants is declining," "the job is undoable," "superintendents are dissatisfied with their university-based preparation," and "women are not in superintendent search pools," we hope to sharpen national attention to focus on real and compelling issues facing the field and make a persuasive case for *data*-driven decision and policy making.

The need for interrupting inaccurate discourse is hardly debatable. For example, although there are few very large urban districts in the United States, problems they face, particularly with regard to superintendent turnover, tend to capture a disproportionate amount of media attention. Regardless of evidence to the contrary, this attention helps to

create a misperception that all districts are facing similar problems. As a consequence, pundits and policymakers continue to call for a heroic leader that can "take charge" and "do the job." In many instances this rhetoric is ideologically based and is accompanied by appeals to school boards that they look outside of education for a "new" leader often described as a former corporate chief executive, army general, or university president. Although very few districts have actually employed superintendents from outside of education, the notion is that strong leaders from outside of education can overcome problems more quickly than the toady bureaucrats that are currently in charge. Thus, in response to a somewhat questionable policy initiative across many states, legislatures have amended superintendent licensure requirements so that noneducators can serve as superintendents.

Examining several high profile cases in which noneducators were selected to lead district reforms may be useful in understanding this line of thinking. John Silber became president of Boston University in 1970 and within a short period of time he was lauded for rescuing this academically and financially troubled institution and transforming it into a thriving center of excellence. He accomplished this largely through his intellectual passion, moral conviction, and the clarity with which he expressed his views. Later, he offered to bring his and the university's expertise to bear on salvaging a troubled school district in the Boston area. He brought a rational, compassionate, and invigorating vision of the future of public schooling; however, within a very short period of time he was forced to acknowledge that the district was shamefully underfunded and suffered from a broad range of social and political problems that were so intractable as to defy solution. He admitted failure and Boston University withdrew from the project. In other instances, school boards have hired former military officers to serve as district superintendents including General Gene Demps (Kansas City), former Marine Colonel Alphonse G. Davis (New Orleans), and General John Stanford (Seattle). Although these individuals brought with them a demonstrated capacity to manage large-scale, complex organizations, their success in achieving specified educational objectives was thwarted by deeply entrenched social, economic, and political problems. Few would disagree that leadership is essential to successful educational reform, but one person cannot hope to prevail over the effects of deeply entrenched social and structural problems that face districts. Most analysts concur that a rational problem identification and problem-solving approach is preferable to, and decidedly less costly than, current policy approaches. They however, are more challenging than vacuous political rhetoric.

Indeed, there is a misunderstanding of leaders and leadership inherent in much of the discourse on the superintendency. The focus on the former tends to move the discussion toward characteristics of heroic leaders, that is, finding the man with the right stuff. Unfortunately this emphasis eclipses the importance of the latter, that is, what leaders contribute to the future well-being of schooling. Many districts have suffered from superintendents hired to implement reform who leave before the effects are understood (Hess, 1999; B. C. Johnson, 2001; S. M. Johnson, 1996; Kowalski, 1995). As these and other scholars have argued, the work of the superintendent is to build capacity within and outside the district to tackle any change of endeavor. Today, especially in the light of "No Child Left Behind" and other federal and state legislation, leadership in the superintendency must be focused on equity and equality issues of ensuring full growth and development of all the students in the district. From eliminating test-score gaps to reducing dropout rates, superintendents, working with and through others, must give their undivided attention to youth who have not been served well by the status quo. Leadership in the superintendency is clearly not only about an individual with vision but also about an individual with a strong moral and ethical grounding in the purpose of leadership. Superintendents must be supported by a stable system of decision making that can be utilized to create the best educational opportunities for all students in the district. To be effective, superintendents need to work in districts that function well so that their educational expertise allows them to facilitate the work of others. Current notions of distributed leadership (Elmore, 1999), constructivist leadership (Lambert, 1995), and feminist leadership (Blackmore, 1989, 1999; Grogan, 2000; Regan, 1990) all advocate flattened organizational structures and the building of relationships as necessary to achieve goals and objectives. Therefore, policy debate should be centered on how to garner the resources to prepare and develop educators to embrace these new forms of leadership. It is evident that attention must be paid to district conditions that enable, rather than prevent, superintendents from achieving their goals.

Although many reformers claim that school boards are making the job of the superintendent impossible and contributing to high turnover rates, data suggest that, on the whole, most superintendents and boards work well together. However, predictive models (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2003) and data from nationwide studies also indicate that political conflict among school board members in some districts contributes to "churning" superintendents and high turnover rates (Glass & Björk, 2003). Rather than calling for a sea change in how school districts are governed across the nation, it may be more prudent to first enlist the

support of the National School Board Association and state affiliates to help stabilize rogue boards. Worst case scenarios would call for institutionalizing alternative governance models that would include giving city and county governments oversight responsibility for public schools, adopting a corporate board model that limits opportunities for micromanagement, and outright takeover by the state. Although these alternative governance strategies also carry some liabilities, they are focused on fixing the root causes of the problem rather than calling for recruiting leaders from outside of the profession, which is a solution tantamount to "Ready, Fire, Aim!"

Contributors to this special issue have provided empirical research that debunks several myths surrounding the current "crisis" in the superintendency. They question the notion of a shortage of applicants, the inadequacy of university preparation, and the prevailing belief that all school board/superintendent relationships are dysfunctional. The authors also point out that many of the recent policy debates have focused on the myths rather than on reality. Above all, the studies in this issue confirm the existence of serious gender and race inequities in the superintendency. This work not only builds on previous work but it validates what has, up until now, been regarded as primarily a women's issue, or a minority issue that is studied mainly by women researchers or scholars of color. For instance, during the past three decades, in examining experiences of women and individuals of color in administration, researchers identified barriers to their entry and advancement in the field, and scholars identified barriers experienced by women and people of color aspiring to administration (Beck, 1994; Chase & Bell, 1990; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Henry, 1995; Jackson, 1995; Ortiz, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 1999). Blount's (1998) groundbreaking historical analysis of women in the superintendency (1873–1995) documents the magnitude of the disparity between the number of women and men in the superintendency over time and underscores the importance of scholarship directed toward identifying the barriers to women in the profession. These historical inequities are confirmed by scholars who note that although the representation of women and people of color in the superintendency is at the highest level achieved during the 20th century, disparities between these groups and men is paradoxical in a field in which women constitute a professional majority (Brunner, 2000, 2003; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999).

In addition, during the past decade, Milstein and associates (1993) and Murphy (1993) found that the number of women surpassed the number of men in professional preparation programs. Tallerico (1999) con-

tended that the near absence of women in the superintendency may have less to do with their lack of training, availability, or presence in the administrator "pipeline" than other factors related to search and selection processes.

Findings of the studies in this issue echo work by feminist scholars, which continues to underscore the importance of "understanding women's and men's experiences together" (Shakeshaft, 1999, p.115). Sensitivity to differences in gender, ethnicity, and race is directed toward redefining the superintendency rather than simply advancing the notion that women approach administration differently or simply affirming generalizations about male administrators (Chase, 1995; Grogan, 1996; Sherr, 1995). This work contributes to the formulation of questions for large-scale empirical studies designed to test hypotheses about similarities and differences among men and women in administration. Comparative studies that search for similarities and differences among contemporary female and male superintendents are an important line of inquiry that can contribute to understanding behaviors and attitudes influenced by gender, race, and ethnicity. These studies can also contribute to our understanding of how superintendents are shaped by the role itself (Pounder, 2000). Conceptualizing leadership in this fashion may eventually lead to an understanding of how male and female leadership characteristics intersect and contribute to the success of educational reform initiatives. For example, Grogan (2000) observes that conventional views of leadership have had little success in emerging reform contexts that call for superintendents to deal with the fragmented and often contradictory environments. She observes that superintendents must become critically aware of how well children are being served, how well schools connect with communities, how well they listen to voices of dissent, and to what extent they are able to work with and through others. These qualities are essential to a superintendent's success in emerging reform contexts and provide a powerful argument for refuting beliefs held by many school board members that men are more qualified to lead than women.

In conclusion, we hope that the evidence included in this issue refutes the popular misconceptions of a crisis in the superintendency that has to do with a shortage of individuals qualified for the superintendency. There may well be a crisis in the superintendency. However, as discussed in this issue, the nature of the crisis has a far different nature and form than what popular literature would have us believe. We hope the works included here will sharpen national attention on the real and compelling issues facing the superintendency, rather than responding to false and mythical dimensions of the crisis.

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