

**THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND SOCIAL CAPITAL:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY ON THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF
WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS IN A MIDWEST STATE**

A Dissertation by

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To my parents: Clyde Raymond Johnson, Jr. and Joyce Irene Johnson

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there.”

-- Jalal ad-Din Rumi

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ABSTRACT

The superintendency is the highest rank one may attain in school organizations and men have historically dominated the position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young & McLeod, 2001). Using a feminist poststructural perspective and a social capital theoretical framework, this narrative inquiry focused on the career experiences of eight women superintendents. This research sought to understand the advantages and disadvantages of social capital in relation to women networking in a male-dominated environment. The study was conducted through the use of eight semi-structured interviews with women superintendents in a Midwest state. The women have varying years of experience in the superintendency and are located across six different regions in the state. The findings from this study found some women superintendents were not lacking in their ability to access and use social capital for beneficial purposes. Implications from this research are made for women superintendents and aspiring women superintendents, state superintendent organizations, and superintendent vacancy search consultants.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction, Research Problem, and Theory

In 1909, Ms. Ella Flagg Young became the first woman superintendent of Chicago schools and declared “Women are destined to rule the schools of every city” (Blount, 1998, p. 1). This early period of the 20th century was coined the “golden age” for women school administrators (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Since teaching is a female dominated profession, it was plausible that women eventually would fill a large percent of superintendent seats. At the time of Ms. Young’s Chicago superintendency, women filled 9% of all superintendents seats, and by 1930 their representation had climbed to a high of 11% (Blount, 1998). They were well on their destined way. However, the golden age for women superintendents was short lived, as the percent of women who served as public school district superintendents fell considerably between the years 1940 to 1970. By the end of the 30-year span in 1970, only 3% of all superintendent roles were filled by women (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Scholars (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989) attributed this decline to the woman’s movement losing its momentum coupled with the throngs of men who returned from wars seeking jobs in education. By 1982, women as superintendents fell to its lowest representation of 1.2% (Glass, 1992).

A decade later, the number of women serving as superintendents began to increase once again. In 1992, women represented 6.6% of superintendents, and by 2000 it was up to 13.2% (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). By 2010, the percentage nearly doubled to 24.1% (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). While gains are being made, they are extremely slow. Surprisingly, there are still fewer women superintendents. The nationwide gender gap in superintendencies is wide, and even wider in this state.

Midwest Region and Midwest State Women Superintendent Percentages

As the percent of women superintendents across the nation peaked in 1930, the number of women superintendents leading districts in the Western states (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, and Michigan) also climbed to a 13% high during the same year (Blount, 1998). However, similar to the trend across the nation, the number of women superintendents in the Midwest then spiraled downward. By 1970, the percentage of women superintendents in the Midwest region had plummeted to 4%. During this same period, the percent of women superintendents in this Midwest state fell even lower to around 2% (Blount, 1998).

In 1983, the state school board association began collecting data on superintendents (Hays, 2012). The data sets show a continual increase in the number of women who fill state superintendent roles. From 1983 to 1989, the percentage of women superintendents averaged less than 1% over the course of seven years, but their representation began climbing in the 1990s. Between 1990 and 1999, the number of women superintendents in this Midwest state increased nearly 6% by the end of the decade. From 2000 to 2010, a 5.7% increase brought the percentage of women superintendents to a 12.3% representation of all state superintendents. Data collected in 2012 reported 15.7% of all state superintendents were women. Again, while the number of women who choose to attain the superintendency increased with each decade, the gender disparity in the state's superintendencies is egregious. In addition, this Midwest state is nearly 10% behind the national average for women superintendents.

Formal and Informal Networks

The underrepresentation of women as superintendents in education is baffling when one considers women outnumber men in the pool of teachers from which future administrators are drawn (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). While women represent three-quarters of all teachers (Bell &

Chase, 1993; Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter, & Orlofsky, 2006), they only fill one-quarter of all superintendent positions. What contributes to such inequality? Tyack and Hansot (1982) posited the underrepresentation of women superintendents as far back as the graded urban school of the early 20th century was due to the “inequitable social relationships of gender” (p. 181). These social relationships are formed via formal and informal networks. What was once called the old boys club is today just called networking (Witmer, 2006).

Networking behaviors as defined by Forreth and Dougherty (2004) are attempts by people to build and maintain relationships with individuals who have the potential to positively influence their career progression. Networking includes “joining professional organizations, seeking high visibility assignments, and participating in social functions” (Forret & Dougherty, 2004, p. 419). Formal networks are comprised of people who represent an organization’s more official structure, such as superior/subordinate relationships (Combs, 2003; Ibarra, 1993; Leicht & Marx, 1997). Formal networks stem from committees, task forces, and teams (Ibarra, 1993). Examples of formal networks in educational organizations are district advisory councils, school improvement committees, and superintendent councils. In contrast, an informal network is more discretionary by nature, and relationships among these networks may be social, work-related, or a combination of both (Ibarra, 1993).

Current scholars (Drentea, 1998; Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007; Tharenou, 2005) have noted a lack of network access as a barrier to women attaining the superintendency. Additionally, one of the major barriers identified by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (FGCC) (1995) for marginalized groups was “little or no access to informal networks of communication” (p. 36). Networks are a beneficial resource when searching for a job (Drentea, 1998; Granovetter, 1995). Since men dominate this Midwest state’s

superintendencies, men have greater access to the quantity and quality of resources provided via their networks. The question raised by this social structure is whether women are underrepresented in the superintendency in this Midwest state because they lack access to the vital resources embedded in male-dominated networks.

This proposed research was born out of curiosity surrounding the dearth of women superintendents in this Midwest state. If women reached a point of being nearly non-existent in the superintendency due to social constraints of the mid-20th century, what factors exist today that continue to limit women's access to top administrative positions? This study proposes to explore how women superintendents navigate the formal and informal networks of a male-dominated leadership field. The aim is to better understand whether the membership and employment of women's networks is critical to attaining and retaining the superintendency.

Research Problem

The superintendency is the highest rank one may attain in school organizations and men have historically dominated the position (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1999; Young & McLeod, 2001). Forty years ago, Title IX legislation was signed into law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex for all education programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance (Valentin, 1997). The law provided women access to higher education and employment where they were previously kept out. While Title IX is not a cure-all for transforming society, some believe it has provided the impetus for gender equity initiatives and remains one of the most effective mechanisms for social change (Hanson, Guilfooy, & Pillai, 2009). Conversely, other scholars (Marshall, 1997; Stromquist, 1997) have critiqued Title IX as an ineffective federal policy and believe the legislation has done very little to eliminate gender equity disparities. Not only is this policy ineffective and unregulated, some believe no new

policies are needed. A common assumption at the policy level is gender equity has already been accomplished (Rhode, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1998).

Progress for women in employment has been achieved over the last forty years. Yet, gender disparities are still apparent, and the underrepresentation of women in top educational administrative positions is still prevalent. While some in society may believe all that can be done has been done, I question whether women superintendents merely accept the gender imbalance in the superintendency as status quo?

The voice of gender equity has been silent, and this silence has kept Americans from noticing that women are still significantly underrepresented in wealth, power, and status compared to men (Rhode, 1997). Title IX was meant to provide everyone equal opportunity to employment. In this respect, Title IX does afford women equal opportunity to apply for superintendent positions via formal mechanisms, such as vacancy postings and application processes (Granovetter, 1995). While women have equal opportunity via formal methods, they do not have equal access via informal methods. Below the surface, other factors contribute to women's underrepresentation. McGuire (2002) posited the "informal side of organizational life" is where "unspoken rules of interaction make gender inequality possible and highly resistant to change" (pp. 303-304). Informal processes contribute as much as formal ones to superintendent placement actions (Moody, 1983), and this creates unequal access. The saying "it's not what you know but who you know" relegates Title IX policy to mere rhetoric. Because factors beyond formal processes are at play, equal opportunity laws may be of little significance at top school administrative levels (Hudson, 1994).

One possibility for the gender disparity today is women lack access to male-dominated networks where resources rich in information about the top spots in education are transmitted

(Moody, 1983). Erickson (2006) emphasized the importance of network influence for women since she believed women, more than men, form networks via informal means. Other scholars (Lin, 2000; Moody, 1983; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999) also have stated the importance of informal networks to women's career advancement. Unfortunately, women may not have access to the same influential networks as white men (Ortiz, 2001). The general belief is networking increases one's opportunities for getting a better job, moving up the career ladder, and increasing promotions or bonuses (de Janasz & Forret, 2008; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Lin, 2000). This possible lack of access to networks limits women's abilities to build critical relationships and capture the necessary resources to aid them in achieving the superintendency. Scholars (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001b; Putnam, 1993) have written on the advantages of network relationships; yet, the advantages may be useful only to those who have access to the dominant group's networks. Dominant group networking in educational administration itself reifies white male dominance by privileging their networks above all others and espousing that "network ties to men are more influential than ties to women" (Erickson, 2006, p. 313). Gender affects relationships, and if networking is where relationships are built and resources are captured, women usually receive less of them (Eagly & Carli, 2009). Women who establish careers as superintendents depend on successfully networking with various individuals to accumulate resources and convert them into future support (Drentea, 1998; Ortiz, 2001; Shakeshaft, et al., 2007). While formal and informal networks may be critical to women attaining the superintendency, gendered networks may stymie women from accessing and using resources thereby continuing the pattern of negating and marginalizing them in top educational leadership positions.

Feminist Poststructural Framework

A feminist poststructural framework was chosen for this qualitative research as a lens to critique how women's lives are marginalized by systems of inequity (Lather, 1992, 2004). By diverging from traditional positivist approaches to research on social capital, research conducted through a critical feminist lens counters previous androcentric assumptions that have guided much research on social capital theory. One aim of feminist poststructuralism is to reconstruct knowledge from a woman's perspective where previous texts rendered women's experiences invisible (Bailey, 2012). Weedon (1997) stated a framework was needed in order to "understand why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men (p. 12). She believed the best avenue for understanding this phenomenon was through feminist poststructuralism. Both Lather (1992) and Weedon (1997) were interested in critical feminist research to empower change. Lather's aim of critical inquiry took into "account how our lives [were] mediated by systems of inequity" (p. 87). Weedon focused on how power was exercised amid the relationship of language, social institutions, and individual consciousness.

Poststructuralism places a critical focus on language origination, as language is where societal relationships of power are established (Crotty, 1998). When conducting research about women, it is necessary to deviate from traditional research practices. Research conducted through a traditional positivist lens finds and establishes universal truths where male experiences represent the basis for all human knowledge (Tanesini, 1999). These established truths reify white male constructs of knowledge and legitimize their hegemonic status in society. Certain truths become privileged while other truths are constrained and controlled (Young & Lopez, 2011). Some believe what qualifies as good research is that which is conducted through the vein of traditional practice. Of course, those who have had the power to define good research have

primarily been white male researchers whose perspectives have traditionally provided the basis for most research texts (Young & Lopez, 2011). Poststructuralism, on the other hand, contrasts positivism and calls upon one to read text while being “an active creator of meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 204). Instead of searching for truth that is waiting to be discovered, poststructuralism is concerned with “understanding the relationship between knowledge and power as well as how and why certain truths are enabled and proliferated” (Young & Lopez, 2011, p. 241). Feminist research questions the universal truths that have perpetuated male privilege and provides not only an alternative view to the dominant version of reality but also provides an avenue to critique common theories and assumptions in order to give voice and visibility to marginalized groups (Bailey, 2012; Lather, 1992). Feminist poststructuralist research further questions the established gendered realms of power and authority. Viewing discourse and discursive practices through a poststructural lens allows one to see whose values and interests have been silenced (Grogan, 1996). In a study of women who aspired to the superintendency, Grogan (1996) used a feminist poststructural framework as a means to helping women recognize and understand the context of their structural situations. She saw value in reforming practice and initiating change.

The aim of feminist poststructuralism in this study is to view social capital theory through a feminist critical lens. Social capital theoretical perspectives have been used to understand the varying forms of relationships in social structures. By deconstructing social capital theory, one can see how the theory not only reifies white, male dominance in social relations but also legitimizes it. Using a feminist poststructural perspective as a lens to critique social capital theory provides the critical standpoint needed to illuminate the experiences of women superintendents in this Midwest state in relation to superintendency attainment and mobility.

Social Capital Theory

Social capital theory is defined through Lin's (1999a, 2000, 2001a, 2001b) theory of social structure and action. Lin has built on Granovetter's (1973) work focusing on network information flow to explore how individuals use personal contacts to gain knowledge about job opportunities. Lin's theory of social structure and action framed social capital as the "resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions" (p. 25). According to Lin, individuals invest in relationships within their networks in order to produce knowledge and gain information for a purposive future use.

As an educational research tool, social capital theories have developed from the early works of James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu, (Dika & Singh, 2002) whose theoretical concepts emerged in the 1980s and propelled social capital into a prolific theory. While their theories differ slightly, both have highlighted the importance of social networks. Bourdieu (1986) viewed social capital from a class perspective where members of the dominant class received recognition and acknowledgement in order to maintain group solidarity thereby preserving the group's dominant position (Lin, 1999a). Coleman (1990) conceived social capital as a collective asset produced through a closed network and emphasized the importance of trust, norms, sanctions, and authority. Despite any difference in theories, "the consensus is growing in the literature that social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures" (Portes, 1998, p. 6).

Social Capital Advantages and Disadvantages

Lin (1999a) posited there are basically four reasons why accessing the resources in social networks would increase outcomes for an individual: (a) resources within a network can facilitate the flow of information, (b) resources can influence others in positions of power, (c)

association with a network can increase individual credibility, and (d) network association can reinforce identity and recognition. The benefit of establishing social ties within networks provides individuals with information about job opportunities not available elsewhere (Granovetter, 1995). Additionally, these social ties may influence others when it comes to making hiring decisions. As Lin stated, “putting in a word carries weight in the decision-making process regarding the individual” (p. 31). As an individual develops relationships within networks, she becomes more credible and increases her social capital. Finally, being recognized as a member of a social group provides “public acknowledgment of one’s claim to certain resources” (Lin, 1999a, p. 31). Lin posited social capital contained three elements intersecting social structure and action: (a) the resources embedded in a social structure, (b) accessibility of those resources by individuals, and (c) how individuals use the captured resources purposefully. A critical look at the theory of social capital rests on the premise of Lin’s second point—network accessibility. If women cannot access the resources, it matters little what the resources are or how to use them.

Social capital is an intangible element formed in the inherent structures of relationships (Portes, 1998). And, like other forms of capital, it is a productive entity involving investments and returns. Coleman (1990) stated there were several forms of social capital and each was determined by its function. He further noted “a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others” (p. 302). The harm manifests when social capital creates inequalities. This happens because not everyone equally invests and acquires social capital resources nor receives equal returns (Lin, 2000).

Lin’s (2001b) conceptualization of social capital is about the benefit it provides to individuals rather than to a collective group. While relationships formed through social networks

benefit group members, it also bars others from access (Portes, 1998). Lin's focus on individual benefits brings to light the negative side of social capital introducing the possibility that it benefits *only* those with access to network resources. His theory of inequality is based on two principles working in tandem: structural constraints and homophily (Lin, 2000). Structural constraints occur when "groups cluster at relatively disadvantaged socioeconomic positions" (Lin, 2000, p. 786). These structural constraints in society provide unequal opportunity to members of different groups. Homophily is the "general tendency for individuals to associate with those of similar group or socioeconomic characteristics (Lin, 2000, p. 786). His premise is that disadvantaged individuals already poor in social capital resources network with others who are similarly poor in social capital. When this happens, network members share a limited amount of information and have very little influence. Lin posited women have less social capital because they associate with smaller, homogenous networks. They operate in disadvantaged networks comprised of more female than male ties. One possibility for overcoming this disadvantage is to develop ties with members of a more advantaged group where there is access to better information and influence (Lin, 2000). Unfortunately, Lin posits disadvantaged members have very little chance of establishing different ties due to structural constraints and homophily.

According to Lin (2000), inequality in social capital may be due to a *capital deficit*, a *return deficit*, or both. *Capital deficit* results when one does not acquire the resources (in quantity or quality) imbedded in his or her social networks (Lin, 2000). Certain social structures and organizations afford opportunities to others unequally. An example is when social groups vary in their social rankings and networks and, as such, may either facilitate or constrain an individual's ability to acquire capital (Lin, 2000). Similarly, groups or networks may choose to

invest their capital in individuals in unequal ways. *Return deficit* results when a given quality or quantity of capital produces different outcomes for people of differing social groups (Lin, 2000). When members of different social groups acquire the same quality and quantity of social capital but receive different outcomes, *return deficit* is at play. An example is when men receive greater rewards than women in the work place, “such as positions in the organization, occupational titles or prestige, and earnings” (Lin, 2000, p. 791). There are three possible reasons for this phenomenon. One is that a woman may not mobilize the appropriate capital for her desired outcome. In other words, she does not have the right connections to help her achieve her goals. A second possibility is social ties are reluctant to support a woman by investing their capital on her behalf. The FGCC (1995) found some job search firms were reluctant to make investments in marginalized groups if the search firms were not convinced there was a market to hire them. Finally, employers respond differentially to equally qualified men and women job candidates due to gender bias.

Theoretically, social capital is viewed to operate as a collective good (Molyneux, 2002). However, critiques of social capital theory argue that benefits are only afforded to those with privileged access (Portes, 1998; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Furthermore, Dika and Singh (2002) noted the emphasis on social capital as a “catch-all for the positive effects of sociability” rendered invisible the negative consequences it had on gender (p. 44). From a gender equity perspective, approaches to social capital have been conservatively biased (Molyneux, 2002). While theorists have highlighted social capital as a positive resource for those who have privileged access, they have left out any discussion of its exclusionary effects (Lin, 2000; Portes, 1998).

Attempting to understand the gender equity issues of social capital becomes more problematic when only approaching it from the perspectives of social capital scholars. An alternate method is to view social capital from a critical perspective and to put women at the center of the conversations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of women superintendents throughout a Midwest state in relation to social networking and social capital resources. Specifically, I aimed to capture their perceptions on whether social networking and the garnering of social capital resources fostered job attainment at the superintendent level throughout their career progression. The study further sought to better understand the perceptions of women's experiences in educational social networks and their network support systems. Qualitative methods filtered through a critical, feminist poststructuralist lens allowed the women participants' lived experiences be shared (Creswell, 2007). The overarching purpose of this study was to provide an informed understanding toward research on women in education as to whether networking and social capital resources are a factor in the underrepresentation of women superintendents in a Midwest state.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this research was as follows: What role does social capital play in women attaining the superintendency? The following research questions guided this study.

1. How do women superintendents in a Midwest state describe their informal and formal social networks at the local, state, and national levels?

2. What are the perceptions of women superintendents in a Midwest state regarding whether informal and formal social networks aided them in achieving their superintendency?
3. How do women superintendents in a Midwest state develop and use social capital to enhance the advancement opportunities for other women?

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This chapter is a review of the literature on a number of topics as related to this study on women, the superintendency, and social capital. The first half of the chapter discusses the literature regarding social capital relevant to women in the workplace. The second half of the chapter includes the literature relevant to what previously has been written regarding the perceived barriers to women attaining the superintendency.

Social Capital

Capital is an asset, benefit, or return on investment. Usually it is thought of in terms of one's wealth, as in economic capital. Social capital is not a tangible good possessed by an individual, but instead a resource (power, wealth, or status) accessible through one's direct and indirect ties (Lin & Erickson, 2008). Over time, researchers have expanded the notion of capital to explain human capital (Schultz, 1961), cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and social capital (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1986; Lin, 1999a; Putnam, 2000). Capital theories have grown in popularity since the 1980s and represent varying perspectives. The premise of capital theories is a surplus value is created via an investment that will yield expected future returns (Lin, 2001a). Social capital theories are heavily linked to the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1990). Bourdieu viewed social capital as a mechanism for reproduction of the dominant class, whereas Coleman saw it as a mechanism contributing to "positive social control where trust, information channels, and norms [were] characteristics of the community" (Dika & Singh, 2002, p. 34).

Coleman's work in social capital was drawn from the research he conducted in the field of education (Marsden, 2005). Coming from a structural-functionalist origin (Dika & Singh, 2002), he defined social capital by its function and believed there were a variety of entities with

two elements in common: they all contained some aspect of social structure, and they facilitated certain actions for the individuals within those structures (Coleman, 1988). Coleman focused his theory on the role social capital played in the development of human capital, a concept introduced by Schultz (1961). His research on children in public and private schools illuminated how parents of middle class families, who developed strong relationships with their children and strong connections in the community, contributed to their children graduating from high school with increased human capital, i.e. knowledge and skills.

Bourdieu's concept of social capital is rooted in social reproduction and symbolic power (Dika & Singh, 2002). His theory comprised the interaction of economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital. Bourdieu's (1986) research on the unequal educational achievement of children coming from different social classes showed how children profited in the academic market relative to the distribution of cultural capital. The more one accumulated cultural capital the more one gained power and knowledge. Cultural capital is how the dominant class invests and acquires certain symbols and meanings through social structures, such as education. The returns from cultural capital investment create social mobility (Lin, 1999a, 2001a). Cultural capital increases when an individual connects with the experts of his closed group or through institutions where acquired skills and knowledge are rewarded. Some forms of social capital are very similar to cultural capital, where gained capital can equate to more knowledge or information and, therefore, more power. Bourdieu (1986) viewed social capital in terms of the collective. He stated:

Social capital is an aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which

provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various sense of the words. (p. 51)

Bourdieu’s social capital was contained within the obligations of actors’ social relationships. He saw social capital as an asset shared collectively among group members.

A commonality among the social capital concepts is they all encompass networks, norms, and trust. It is based on complex networks of association, either tightly bound together or loosely connected through bridges or weak ties that operate via certain norms and trust (Farr, 2004). It is the ability of an individual to accumulate benefits through the connections in her network or through others via their networks. Generally, social capital benefits include timely access to better information, to better financial or material resources, and to better visibility and legitimacy through network sponsorship (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

Network structure and tie strength. Because both Coleman (1990) and Bourdieu (1986) viewed social capital as an asset for the collective community, they believed it was a *closed* or dense network where capital was accumulated, maintained, and used for the improvement of the group via *strong* ties to one another (Lin, 2001b). The relationships are more personal and developed. Granovetter (1973), conversely, described the elements of social capital as flourishing in an *open* network where social capital is gained through the strength of *weak* ties. In Granovetter’s (1995) study of how 282 men in Massachusetts found their jobs, he discovered men who had the most success in a job search used weak tie contacts. His research comprised a random cluster sampling of men working and living in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1969. The focus of his study was on men who worked in professional, technical, and managerial jobs and had changed employers within the last five years. Granovetter saw weak ties as a bridge connecting an individual’s various networks, which created more and shorter paths to

information rich resources. In his theory, more people could be reached through an open network of weak ties rather than through a closed or dense network of strong ties. McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1982) similarly believed weak ties were important to the flow of information in informal networks. They found the network consequence of women to be disadvantaged because they belonged to fewer, heterogeneous voluntary organizations. Through their study of 1,799 men and women belonging to voluntary organizations in Nebraska, they found the large difference in their association to organization size produced a “dramatic difference in the social resources available to men and women” (p. 902). They concluded women would have better opportunity to access weak tie contacts if they operated in larger organizations.

The problem with a closed network is that useful information from outside the group never gets in (Burt, 1998; Lin, Vaughn, & Ensel, 1981; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). In closed or strong networks, information tends to be redundant because it cycles through the same individuals in a group. Since everyone is closely connected, the information being passed along becomes similar or redundant over time. Whereas, weaker ties formed from an open network can result in new sources of information rich resources (Portes, 1998). Therefore, the greater the diversity of one’s network the more likely the flow of information will continue to be new and accessible from a wider social network (Drentea, 1998; Glanville, 2004). The best course of action, however, may be to have networks consisting of both strong and weak ties. A study conducted by Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) suggested both weak ties and strong ties were beneficial to individuals gaining social capital resources. Their analysis of the weak tie measure had a “stronger and more robust effect on social resources” (Seibert, et al., 2001, p. 231). They found individuals who developed strong relationships were likely to receive more information and better resources. They believed because there is not an infinite amount of time for one to go

around developing strong relationships with her many weak ties, she should be selective with whom she chooses to develop strong ties.

Gender and networks. Some scholars believe women who network with other women receive expressive (friendship and social support) returns but will be limited in their ability to increase instrumental (better jobs, promotions) returns. Lin (2000) posited women are more connected to closed networks; therefore, their resources are disadvantaged, small, and less diverse. When women operate in disadvantaged and homophilous networks, they limit their ability to gain access to the social capital resources needed for career progression. Research suggests a more diverse network is created when one networks in more heterogeneous associations (Glanville, 2004; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987).

Some believe women will have less social capital simply because they are women (Cross & Lin, 2008). Bell (1988) posited the structural framework of an educational organization pushed women toward social homogeneity due to the large number of men excluding women from their inner circles. When this happens, women lack access to influential social capital resources. Women networking with mostly women may not be the result of choice as much as to the structural constraints of an organization (Ibarra, 1993; Tharenou, 1999). Research conducted by Liecht and Marx (1997) showed women's internal networks may have limited women from not only being aware of possible jobs but also constrained them in their ability to influence the selection for those jobs. Liecht and Marx's study was conducted at a large banking firm covering a four-month period in 1988. While 322 new hires provided usable information for their research, the focus of their study was on subsample of 127 external hires. The results of their study found when women's informal networks were more same-gender rather than cross-gender, "women were more likely to end up in gender-typical jobs" at the bank (p. 926).

Eagly and Carli's (2007) book, *Through the Labyrinth*, encompassed their research on the affects of gender on leadership and social influence. Their book was based on a plethora of research studies, and their conclusions stemmed from various research approaches. The organizations in which they studied gender issues ranged from the federal workforce to business and managerial organizations. They used the symbol of the labyrinth to replace the metaphor of the glass ceiling because they no longer viewed women's advancement as butting up against an invisible, impenetrable barrier. Instead, they saw the labyrinth as a complex journey where passage was not simple or direct and required persistence, awareness, and analysis. Eagly and Carli found that women leaders faced challenges in their pursuit toward building social capital in male-dominated organizations. Even in organizations that were gender integrated, women appeared to network more with women and men more with men. They concluded women would have greater influence "from participating in networks with the generally more powerful group of men" (p. 145). In other words, if women want to have *access* to social capital resources and receive instrumental returns, they need to network with men. Yet, women do benefit from women networks. Women rely on one another for social support, to reduce feelings of isolation, for role modeling, and to receive information on how to combat discrimination and overcome obstacles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, research has shown associations built around expressive returns are more gender segregated and smaller and, therefore, more likely to constrain social networks (Glanville, 2004; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1986).

A study conducted by Cross and Lin (2008) researched whether women were historically disadvantaged based on the homophily principle. Their research compiled data from a national telephone Job Search survey conducted in 2002. They chose 557 respondents from the 25 largest metropolitan areas who were currently working or had previously worked. Their study was a co-

gender analysis similar to one conducted by Erickson (2004). Erickson found the sizes of networks for men and women were similar, but the gender composition of the networks was very different. Erickson discovered women's networks were made up of more women than men, and therefore determined they had less access to social capital than their male peers. However, Cross and Lin (2008) found men and women had equal access to social capital, even when taking into consideration the gender composition of the network. They also believed the quality of one's social ties were directly correlated to the height of her status. In other words, the higher one has climbed on her career ladder will result in more valuable information and better influence from her connections.

Cross and Lin (2008) determined women have "significantly narrowed any gap in access to social capital with respect to co-gender homophily" (p. 378). Women have no less access to ties than do men. Consistent with Erikson's (2004) findings, they found "men and women generally have equal access to social capital" (p. 378). Furthermore, their study confirmed gender had zero negative affect in status attainment outcomes. The Cross and Lin study may point to progress being made for women regarding social networks. A study conducted by Parks-Yancy (2006) on the effects social group membership had on social capital resources found race played a larger role than did gender. Parks-Yancy analyzed surveys taken from 1994 to 1998. The survey was the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) given annually from 1979 to 1993, at which point the survey was given biannually. The surveys provided a representative sample of 10,000 males and females. Many ethnicities were represented; however, blacks and whites made up the majority. Race proved to play a larger role in social capital deficits than did gender, and Parks-Yancy concluded white men have more access to social capital resources and are more likely to be promoted as a result. She further stated, "part of the

effect of gender ... on disparate career outcomes does come from differential access to and returns from social capital resources” (p. 542). In conclusion, Molyneux (2002) found literature on social capital had little to say about gender relations and much to say about men’s networks, and this in itself led to equity issues.

Formal and informal network access. Social capital resources play a critical role in either limiting one’s career progression or helping to advance it. One possibility for the gender disparity in the superintendency today is women lack access to male-dominated networks where resources rich in information are shared among group members (Brass, 1985; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Molyneux, 2002; Tharenou, 1999). Increasing women’s numbers in district leadership roles that eventually lead to filling future superintendent vacancies with women is through them being able to build weak tie relationships through formal and informal networks (Edwards, Edwards, & DeWitt Watts, 1984; Ibarra, 1993; Ortiz, 2001). Building relationships among male dominated networks can be difficult for women, especially when social activities are centered on male interests, such as golf outings or drinks after work (Eagly & Carli, 2009; Molyneux, 2002). Men may have the advantage in network access because women are often excluded from informal social networks that involve male camaraderie and from social activities such as clubs and sports (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; T. Petersen, Saporta, & Seidel, 2000).

Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel (2000) conducted a case study on the hiring process of a high-tech firm in the U.S. focusing on the effects of gender and social networks. According to Petersen, et al., “In the United States, 50% of job seekers find their jobs through personal networks” (p. 768). In their study, the main referral method for applications to the high-tech organization was through a friend for 51% of the applicants. Two out of three applicants who

were referred by a friend were hired. Over 80% of the offers for hire came from applicants who used personal or professional networks. In respect to gender, the authors concluded the organization was not an old boys network, but rather a “white young girls and boys network” (T. Petersen, et al., 2000, p. 810). The advantage one had to getting hired was directly related to using a personal or professional network, but gender gave no particular advantage. In this study, women who used a personal or professional network in the hiring process had equal access to capital resources and equal returns due to those resources.

In summary, social capital has been proven to increase one’s potential for obtaining a better job and earning higher pay. Where women were once excluded from men’s informal networks and from accessing the benefits embedded within those networks, some studies have shown that women are now able to breach the inner circles of male-dominated networks. While homophilous networks may be advantageous to white men (Ibarra, 1993), they have proven to limit women’s access to the critical social capital resources that positively affect career advancement. Women who receive support from diverse, heterogeneous networks are able to better facilitate their career progression (Tharenou, 1999).

Social Capital and the Superintendency

Scholars (Grogan, 1996; Tallerico, 2000a) researching women who specifically aspire to the superintendency discussed the importance of connections and networking. Tallerico (2000a) suggested for women, “a combination of competencies and connections [were] important to accessing the superintendency” (p. 129). Competencies come from human capital, such as education or professional credentials, whereas connections are created through social capital. Grogan (1996) concluded women aspiring to the superintendency needed the support of influential sponsors. A strong mentor and mentee relationship maximized the benefit of the

mentee developing strong ties to a mentor's network (Ibarra, 1993). As a scholar outside the field of education, Tharenou (1999) stated, "When women had a strong sponsor, they advanced more to executive levels and early" (p. 123). Like other executive positions, a possible barrier to women attaining the superintendency is their lack of access to social capital resources found in the dominant culture's formal and informal networks (Ibarra, 1993; Ortiz, 2001; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

Lack of mentors, networks, and role models. Women were more prevalent in superintendent positions during the 1930s, so it is not surprising to find that strong women networks also existed during that period. The women's movement at the turn of the 20th century brought women together who worked in supportive and caring networks; they created organizations and institutions that nurtured social and political endeavors (Freedman, 1979). Social groups were formed among teachers and various other informal groups provided single women the impetus to create and define their own subcultures (Blount, 2004).

Earlier studies by Edson (1995) found women who had mentors early in their careers were more successful and committed to pursuing leadership positions. Forty-two percent of the women in her study who were mentored became principals, while only 17% of non-mentored women advanced in their careers. Professional mentors are critical to women's career success. A connection to a mentor increases information and access more quickly than if one were to go it alone. Mentors develop their subordinates' knowledge, act as role models, assist with career choices and job challenges, provide access to information, and help them meet others through professional networks that might otherwise take years (Dean, 2009). Brunner and Grogan's (2007) study sought to not only find out if mentors existed for women who aspire to the superintendency but also if those mentors existed in large schools as well as small schools.

Additionally, they were curious if women received mentorship from other women superintendents. They found that assistant superintendents had more experience working for women superintendents in larger districts than in smaller ones. Approximately 30% of the women stated they have had experience working for a women superintendent. Yet in smaller districts, 79% of central office administrators stated they had no experience working for a woman. Central office administrators in small school districts were most likely to receive less same-sex mentoring than their peers in larger districts. It is also likely women will have received less mentoring, period. Van Tuyle and Watkins (2009) noted female superintendents felt their confidence challenged when established groups of male superintendents provided few opportunities for female networking and mentoring.

Professional associations are one manner in which women network with other women and receive the mentorship and role models they seek. One of the greatest benefits of professional associations is the opportunity to network (Glass, et al., 2000). The organizations women most regularly join are *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)* with 74% of women leaders belonging and the *American Association of School Administrators (AASA)* with 57% having membership (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Relative to Lin's (2001b) theory of social structure and action is how gendered associations reflect structural constraints. Research conducted by Kowalski, et al. (2011) found men were slightly higher (92.8%) than women (88%) to be involved in state superintendent associations. Yet, women had a higher membership rate than men in *ASCD* (66% to 44% for men). The findings from this current research lead one to conclude women tend to be involved in organizations that focus more on curriculum and instruction whereas men belong to more traditional superintendent organizations. An important aspect to understand about organizational membership is knowing

that a heterogeneous organization is more likely to expand one's social network (Glanville, 2004).

In summary, more women who are mentored and supported in their desire to aspire to the superintendency are more successful toward career and goal accomplishment than those who are not mentored. The most common and positive mentoring for women comes from women superintendents. In the absence of women superintendents, social networks provided through professional organizations allow women the opportunity to network and seek mentors. When individuals find themselves on the periphery of the dominant group, networks may provide access to beneficial resources needed for career progression (Dean, 2009).

Perceived Barriers to Women Attaining the Superintendency

Many scholars (Brunner, 2008; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan, 2000; Newton, 2006; Tallerico, 2000a; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009) have written about the barriers keeping women educators from achieving the apex of their career climb. There are myriad barriers identified not only for women who currently serve as superintendents but also for those who aspire to the superintendency. A review of the extant literature from the 1990s to 2000s has countered the androcentric bias of the superintendency and brought forth women's experiences, highlighting the barriers that have kept them from attaining top school administrative positions.

Family members have not been willing or able to move which kept some aspiring women from seeking jobs as a superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Sex stereotyping in the selection process and gender biases from search committees have been identified as barriers for women (Newton, 2006; Tallerico, 2000a; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009). And the career paths of women are often non-linear compared to their male counterparts, which limits their experiences

in particular positions and often stymies them from becoming future district leaders (Brunner, 2008; Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Responsibilities of the matriarch. Researchers have found that a common barrier among women who seek the superintendency is family responsibility (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989; VanTuyle & Watkins, 2009). Because a woman is expected to be everything to everyone, she often must juggle her family and her career. Grogan's (1996) data revealed "women aspiring to the superintendency move back and forth between the different discourses, professional and personal, never at any time able or willing to abandon completely the practices that have constituted her as partner, mother, or homemaker" (p. 110). She further expressed that women in her research felt pressure from possibly failing in their roles as mothers, for being responsible to maintain the relationships in the home, and for taking care of household chores. However, in the 2003 AASA study, Brunner and Grogan (2007) found women who aspired to the top position were raising or had raised children during their tenure. Nearly a decade later, Grogan's research found fewer women perceived family responsibility as impeding their quest to the superintendency.

The indirect path to the top. A career involves a sequence of jobs or positions ordered so that each provides experiences considered necessary to perform in subsequent positions. Career patterns consist of several differing positions allowing organizations to train, evaluate, and place their employees (Adkison, 1981). However, researchers have long cited the career paths women take are much different than those of men who aspire to the superintendency (Brunner, 2008; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, et al., 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Tallerico, 2000a; Young & McLeod, 2001). Male superintendents have typically left the classroom after five years of teaching (Glass, et al., 2000) and have landed a superintendency position after a

tenure as assistant secondary principal or elementary principal then a position as secondary principal. From that level, many men go directly to the superintendent seat bypassing a central office administrative job (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Women, on the other hand, do not have vertical paths to the superintendency and often enter the superintendency much later in their careers, spending a longer time as classroom teachers. A majority of women who aspired to the superintendency began first as elementary teachers and then most often moved onto an elementary principalship. Brunner and Grogan (2007) cited in their 2003 AASA study that 58% of women were elementary teachers and 48% were elementary principals prior to being superintendents. Their AASA study cited the most common path for women to reach the superintendency was by way of teacher to principal to central office administrator. Young and McLeod's (2001) study reinforced the typical career path for women. The women from their study who were in administrative certification programs saw themselves becoming elementary principals. Some thought they would eventually aspire to a curriculum director position, and a few would probably seek assistant principalships at the secondary level. None of the women in their study stated they aspired to become secondary principals or superintendents.

Kim and Brunner's (2009) more recent study of career mobility also confirmed the typical career path for women is slower and less direct than men's career paths. They found women's path to be elementary or secondary principal to central office director to superintendent. Because many women begin in elementary positions, they lack the opportunity to serve in an athletic director position and lose visibility and networking opportunities. However, Kim and Brunner's study did find women were no longer staying in teaching positions as long as had been previously reported. Similar to men, women were staying in the classroom for only five years before seeking an administrative role. Their study further shed light on the discrepancy between

men and women's career paths. They found men enter the superintendency via a secondary principal role whereas women enter via an elementary principal role. Because of this, men have the advantage to create more opportunities for visibility and interactions with community members and families due to the various evening activities and athletics of the secondary school. Because men take more line positions and women spend their careers in both line and staff positions, women's career advancement to the top is slower (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Most importantly, Kim and Brunner's research highlights the importance a position as secondary principal plays in the goal toward the superintendency.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative, narrative design (Chase, 1995, 2005) was used for this study to answer the research questions related to women's networks and how social capital affects superintendency attainment and retention. The benefit of a narrative inquiry to study social capital and women superintendents in a Midwest state is the possibility it lends toward a focus on positions of power and privilege by placing the woman storyteller at the center of providing valued data (Lemley & Mitchell, 2012). Additionally, "narratives are the means of human sense-making" (Squire, 2008, p. 43). Qualitative methods provided for a richer, deeper inquiry toward what each participant experienced relative to her networking within a male-dominated group (Creswell, 2007). A narrative inquiry approach allowed me to capture the complexity, the varying perspectives, and the human centeredness of each woman's story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lemley & Mitchell, 2012; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Finally, this approach was chosen as it aligned well to the feminist, poststructural framework.

While the methods in this research are qualitative and encompass a feminist perspective, the methods themselves are not distinctly feminist. Harding (2007) argued against the idea of a feminist method of research. She stated drawing on women's experiences is what makes the research feminist in nature. Hesse-Biber and Piatteli (2007) further confirmed feminist inquiry is best captured through qualitative methods:

At the root of feminist inquiry is attention to power and how knowledge is built.

Feminist research takes people as active, knowing subjects rather than passive objects of study. Knowledge is reproduced and mediated through lived experience and communicated through interaction in the form of face-to-face encounters, textual

discourse, or visual mediums. Tapping into lived experiences is the key to feminist inquiry and requires innovative practices in developing relationships and building knowledge. (p. 147)

Key to methodology is craftily linking theory to analysis and linking research questions to approaches. As social research contains an element of the unknown, this research design was flexible in order to allow theory and data collection to inform one another (Lewis, 2003). This method of study allowed for a more participatory and reflexive approach to knowledge construction diverging from positivist, male-centered traditions (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). Additionally, this narrative study took a critical, feminist approach (Creswell, 2007). Through this lens, I discovered if inequities were inherent in certain social circles and learned whether women lacked access to social networks or if they received the expected returns from their networks. Research conducted through the vein of critical inquiry aims to challenge commonly held assumptions about conventional social structures by focusing on hegemonic relationships and exposing injustices (Crotty, 1998). By simultaneously applying a feminist lens to this research, conventional assumptions about the *good ol' boy network* were challenged and the experiences of those who are often silenced could be heard (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). While many studies have focused on the underrepresentation of women superintendents (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Shakeshaft, et al., 2007; Tallerico, 2000b), few focused specifically on whether women are limited in their access to powerful social networks and if lack of access might contribute to their underrepresentation in the superintendency.

This chapter provides the details of the research methodology and design procedures used for this study. The research design was comprised of the research context, participants, data

collection plan, data analysis and interpretation, and research quality. A final section includes the researcher's position.

Research Context

The research context for this study was a Midwest state. The pseudonym for the state in this study henceforth is called "Midwest State." Additionally, all city names in this study have been changed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. As of the 2010 U.S. Census data, the state's population was 2.8 million and represented less than 1% of the country. The following demographic information about the state and its public schools was provided by the state school boards association research department (Hays, 2012). The K-12 headcount enrollment in 2013 was 492,301 students. As of July 2012, the median K-12 student enrollment for a state school district was 564 children, with the largest district having an enrollment of 45,322 and the smallest district enrollment at 71. In the 2012-2013 school year, the state had a total of 286 superintendents (State Department of Education, 2011). Of the 286 current superintendents, 45 (15.7%) are women. This is an increase of 2% since 2009-10, when I first began to analyze data on women superintendents in Midwest State. However, the percentage of women superintendents in the state is just now reaching what was considered the national norm a decade ago, and it is still well below the current national marker of 24% (Kowalski, et al., 2011).

Districts in Midwest State are identified by a classification system, which is represented by high school enrollment numbers rather than total district enrollment count. Classifications range from A (small districts) to AAA (large districts). Although it is high schools that are given the classification, as a general rule school districts in Midwest State are identified by their high school classification; i.e., double-A school district. Classifications are determined each year on student enrollment for grades ten through twelve as of September 20, the official student count

day (State High School Athletic Association, 2011). While some districts with multiple high schools may have various classifications in their district, the district is associated with the highest high school classification of that district. An example showing how district size is matched to the high school classification system in Midwest State is provided in Table 1. Based on the data gathered and represented at the time of the study, almost half of the school districts were small districts. Middle size districts made up nearly 40% of all districts in Midwest State, and large districts only comprised 12% of all schools. Of the 34 largest districts, the majority (28) had student populations under 10,000. Two districts in Midwest State had student populations in the approximate range of 12,000 to 18,000 students; 3 districts had populations in the 20,000-student range. And the largest district in Midwest State had a student population of 45,013 as of the count date on September 20, 2010.

Table 1

Midwest State School District Size Classification

Classification	District Size	Number of Districts	Percent of all Districts
A	60-500	140	49%
AA	501-2,500	112	39%
AAA	2,501-45,013	34	12%

Based on data obtained from the state school boards association research department in July 2012, the majority of the 45 women superintendents lead smaller school districts. A graphic representation showing the size of districts in Midwest State in which women were superintendents is presented below in Table 2. When comparing women to all Midwest State superintendents, 27% led in single-A districts, 25% led in double-A districts, and 21% led in

larger triple-A districts. When compared just among women, 50% of them were superintendents of small school districts.

Table 2

Women District Leaders by District Size for 2011-2012

District Classification	Number of Women	Percent of Women among Women	Percent of Women among All Supts
A	22	48%	27%
AA	16	36%	25%
AAA	7	16%	22%

Research Participants and Selection Process

The participants in this study were selected using non-probability or purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling allowed me to “discover, understand, and gain insight” from the participant sample in which the most can be learned (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Certain criteria were established from which to choose participants that directly reflected the purpose of the study and best complemented the research questions in order to provide the most relevant, comprehensive, and rich information (Lewis, 2003; Merriam, 2009).

The research participants were women superintendents of Midwest State K-12 public educational organizations. In order to identify the 45 women superintendents in a Midwest State, I created a state map with a layout of all 286 school districts identified by district boundaries. I created three maps pinpointing which districts women were leading as of June 2010, June 2011, and June 2012. I divided the map into six regions: northeast, southeast, north central, south central, northwest, and southwest. Each year a new woman joined the superintendency, she was identified by a blue colored marker on the map. Women who had been in the superintendency

for at least two years were given a green colored marker on the map. And women who had been superintendents for three years or more were given a red colored marker on the map. As I considered women superintendents to participate in the study, I wanted to ensure I selected women who were geographically dispersed throughout the Midwest State; women who were new to the superintendency as well as those who were veterans; and women who led in rural, urban, and suburban districts. My goal in looking over the three-year span was to recognize how much mobility from district to district there was among women superintendents in the state. There was none. Any changes to the map over the course of three years were due to women superintendents being newly hired or those who were leaving for retirement or other reasons. There were no substantive data indicating women were leaving one district and being hired into another district.

Once the three maps were created, I took the information on women superintendents I had obtained from the research department at the state school boards association and created several spreadsheets in which to analyze the possible participants. A total of five spreadsheets were created. The first three spreadsheets were titled as follows: 2009-10, 2010-11, and 2011-12. The purpose of these spreadsheets was to gather data on every women superintendent in the state during those three school years. I collected information on their district number, their name, their geographic location based on the six categories identified above, and the district size classification. For each of the three years, I then analyzed the raw data to determine the raw number and the percentage of women working in each geographic location; the raw number and percentage of women leading in each of the district sizes as compared to all superintendents; and the raw number of percentage of women working in districts sizes compared to just women. My fourth spreadsheet took all districts with women superintendents across the three years and

aligned them side-by-side in a single spreadsheet. This spreadsheet was titled “comparison data.” This allowed me to once again look for changes across the years and search for women who might have mobility from district to district. On this spreadsheet, I color-coded the women based on one year or less in the superintendency, two years in the superintendency, and three years or more years in the superintendency. The final spreadsheet was titled “sort and select.” From this spreadsheet, I was able to sort the women by size of district, by geographic location, and by years as a superintendent. Through the various sorts, I was able to identify women who would generally represent women superintendents in Midwest State. In my goal of looking for 6 to 12 superintendents, I found 8 women superintendents who would most fairly and evenly reflect other women superintendents in respect to location, size of district, and years as a superintendent. If I were to choose beyond eight, I found any one of the three categories would be too heavily represented. I then went back to my state school district map of June 2012 and pinpointed where the eight women superintendents were located as a visual representation.

I invited 8 of the 45 women superintendents to participate in the study. I contacted each of the women via email and sent her a Letter of Introduction where I explained the study and invited her to participate (see Appendix A). In the email, I requested to have a follow-up phone call in order to answer any questions she may have and to receive consent for participation. If the superintendent agreed to participate in the study, I emailed her the consent form for review (see Appendix B). The consent form was reviewed and signed at the time of the individual interview.

The eight women I originally asked to participate in my study all consented. Two of the superintendents came from “A” size districts, three superintendents came from “AA” size districts, and three superintendents came from “AAA” size districts. The geographic areas from

which the women led school districts in Midwest State were as follows: one was in northwest; three were in northeast; one was in southwest; two were in south central, and one was in southeast. As of June 2012, the women's years of experience as a district superintendent were as follows: three of the eight women superintendents were in their first year of the superintendency; one was in her second year; and four had three or more years of experience.

The women superintendents who participated represented women superintendents across the spectrum for Midwest State. Some were very new to their positions while others had been established in their districts for several years. Some women superintendents were at the hub of educational networks in bigger cities while others were geographically located on the periphery. And finally, each represented the range of small, medium, and large district sizes. Lewis (2003) posited "the value of qualitative research is in understanding rather than measuring difference" (p. 50). The variance in women superintendents' years of experience, the size of the district in which they led, and the region in which they lived illuminated the research. Patton (2002) termed this method "maximum variation sampling" (p. 234). Through this method, I studied a few individuals with unique characteristics and discovered common themes among them. Identifying the presence or absence of networks and the access to social capital resources among these variances led to a better understanding of the research problem.

Table 3 shows a graphic representation of the women who agreed to participate in the study. Each woman was given a pseudonym in order to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

Table 3

Demographics of Women Superintendent Participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Total Years in Education	Years as a Superintendent	Education Level	District Classification
Dottie	50-54	30	10	Ed.S.	A
Dorothea	55-59	38	17	Ph.D.	AAA
Faye	55-59	30	4	Ed.D.	AAA
Katherine	45-49	25	2	Ed.D.	AAA
Gwyneth	45-49	21	>1	Ed.S.	A
Harriett	45-49	19	>1	Ed.S.	AA
Shirley	55-59	33	6	Ed.S.	AA
Peggie	55-59	28	>1	Ed.S.	AA

Data Collection Plan

The data collected for this study consisted of individual interviews and a document review of individual resumes. I had initially planned to ask the participants to provide, via a written document, a reflection of their personal experiences as they networked or attended conferences. However, once I entered into the field and began to collect interviews, I found it necessary to adjust my plans. I chose to void the personal reflection element of my study because I did not want to impose upon the participants' time more than I had already.

I collected data in Winter 2013 by conducting individual in-depth interviews with the selected women superintendents from across Midwest State. By using interviews to collect data

in this study, participants were better situated to describe their personal experiences in relation to accessibility of social capital through network relationships (Lewis, 2003). Secondary information was derived from a document review of participants' resumes and/or vitas. The aim of using various instruments to collect data was because many sources were better than a single source and this led me to a more fuller understanding of the women's experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Narrative Interviews. The primary source of data came from in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview format consisting of open-ended questions. Feminist scholars (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992) have written about and debated approaches to interviewing. A semi-structured or feminist approach to the interview allowed for more collaboration and reflexivity throughout the interview journey. This approach was also more subjective than objective and was consistent with the narrative inquiry approach. DeVault and Gross (2007) stated "rather than viewing women informants as objects of the researcher's gaze, feminists should develop ways of conceptualizing the interview as an encounter between women with common interests, who would share knowledge" (p. 178). By using a more reflexive and interactive approach, I was able to avoid objectifying the participant, thus allowing for collaboration to take place between the interviewee and me (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003).

The interview protocol was a semi-structured format. Overall, general questions were asked of the participants; however, the questions were few and far between. Once a question was posed, the interviewee was provided the latitude to share her experiences at length. Using a semi-structured format produced non-standardized information allowing the researcher to better highlight the differences among the participants (Reinharz, 1992). Furthermore, open-ended

questions allowed the participants to engage in storytelling, a method of narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

I conducted semi-structured one-on-one interviews with eight women superintendents. An interview protocol was employed; however, considerable latitude was given in order to allow me to pursue a varying range of topics, which allowed each participant to shape the conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Each interview took place in a location that was mutually agreed upon by each participant and me. Interview questions are contained in Appendix C.

Document review. This study included a review of participants' resumes and/or vitas as a secondary source in order to gather information on participants' previous administrative jobs and to review membership in professional associations. The aim in reviewing resumes and/or vitas was to gather descriptive information that provided insight toward advancing categories and themes (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the resumes highlight what a person thinks is important information and what she wants to reveal about herself to others. Resumes and/or vitas were collected prior to the scheduled interviews and were used to design interview questions relevant to each participant.

Personal reflection. A personal reflection was initially going to be requested from each participant after the initial interview regarding perceptions of her formal and informal social networks (Chase, 2005; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Their personal reflections would have been accepted as the participants saw fit to provide. Ideally, their personal reflections would have followed engagement in formal and informal networking activity. However, after spending time with each participant during the interview, it became apparent to me that further requests for their time was too much to ask.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The framework of analysis and interpretation for this study came from the research of Brunner (2000) and Chase (1995). In her book *Ambiguous Empowerment*, Chase conducted a narrative study of 27 women superintendents in order to better understand their experiences in a “male- and white-dominated profession” (p. 217). Chase used the term “discursive realm” to identify a set of discourses to categorize how the women talked about their professional work and how they talked about their experiences of inequality. Her premise was on the disjunction between these two realms. She believed the realms distinctly shaped the forms of talk during her interviews. When the women superintendents talked about professional work, Chase viewed their talk as belonging to a “settled, taken-for-granted discursive realm, while talk about inequality generally belong[ed] to an unsettled, explicitly ideological discursive realm (Chase, 1995, p. 17).

Similarly, Brunner (2000) conducted a narrative study on 12 women superintendents’ professional work experiences. Her data analysis took place in four stages. In Stage 1, she divided the narrative data into two taxonomies: settled talk and unsettled talk. In Stage 2, she organized the data into five emergent themes and then further broke them down into the settled and unsettled talk taxonomies. In Stage 3, she provided discussion and analysis guided by relevant literature. And finally, in Stage 4, she examined “each topic across taxonomies for strategic discursive treatment of experiences of inequality” (p. 82). During Stage 4, Brunner tied the experiences of inequality back to categories identified by Chase and Bell (1990).

The realm of settled and unsettled talk spans the continuum of *individual* on one end and *group* on the other. According to Chase (1995), discourse about professional work was easy as a researcher to ask questions about and easy for participants to share stories about; it was un-

problematic. The discursive realm of professional work allowed the women to highlight their individual achievement. On the other hand, “discourse about inequality occupies an uneasy place in American culture” (Chase, 1995, p. 20). The discourse about inequality was problematic. Chase posited when women tell stories about their professional work they are focusing on themselves as individuals and easily talk about their achievements. However, when talk turns to discussion of inequality, the focus turns from individuals to groups. In discussing inequality, the individual woman must now identify herself as belonging to a member of a particular race, class, or gender. This discussion is more unsettled. Chase stated,

They know that other women encounter similar experiences of discrimination, but they seek *individual* solutions to the collective problem of inequality, solutions that make sense given the structural and discursive context of educational administration. In this profession, a lonely, isolated struggle against inequality is the requirement and cost of professional success. (Chase, 1995, p. 33)

Both Chase (1995) and Brunner (2000) drew upon Swidler’s (1986) theoretical ideas about “settled” and “unsettled” cultural periods for their narrative analysis. A settled culture encompasses tradition and common sense; whereas, an unsettled culture encompasses competing ideologies (Swidler, 1986). Discussion of professional work highlights the achievement of the individual, which is representative of American values and traditions (Brunner, 2000; Chase, 1995). Discussion on this topic represents the settled culture. To the contrary, Chase stated, women superintendents’ “achievement arouses the culture’s persistent ideological debates concerning inequality and social change” (p. 12). This topic highlights the unsettled realm.

The analysis of data for this dissertation began with the first two stages of Brunner’s (2000) data analysis. I classified the narrative data into two categories of settled and unsettled

talk. I further sought to identify emergent themes by unitizing, categorizing, and relating narrative data back to the theory of social capital between statements about women superintendents' professional work and about general gender issues (Brunner, 2000; Chase & Bell, 1990). Narrative data unfolded through conversations with each participant and have been presented as themes emerged.

In addition to the above framework, the data were analyzed through a critical, feminist poststructural lens as they related to the concepts of social capital theory. Overall, the elements of narrative analysis comprised characters (women superintendents), events (formal and informal networks), and themes. Themes were linked to the research questions, social capital theory, and the discursive realms of professional work and inequality. Principles of the theory were woven through the data to reach findings and make connections between the participant's perspectives and the researcher's frameworks. From the analysis, findings and conclusions were drawn.

Analysis of interviews and documents. The qualitative raw data collected from interviews were transcribed verbatim from audio recordings. A reading and re-reading of transcripts was necessary to fully identify into which category of settled or unsettled talk the narrative data would be placed. The document review encompassed reviewing participants' resumes and/or vitas prior to individual interviews. Being able to review resumes and/or vitas prior to interviews helped create interview questions specific to each individual. Having the resumes and/or vitas to review after interviews aided the narrative analysis process.

In the analysis of interviews and documents—the narrative framework, the theoretical framework, and research questions guided the study toward the retelling of characters, events, and themes as related to the participants' experiences. Each participant's story was created through several phases of data analysis. The first phase was to carefully read through each

transcript while simultaneously listening to the audio recording of the interview. During this first reading, I made comments in the margin of each transcript and annotated a theme around which that particular conversation was built. The next phase involved a second reading of the transcript in order to recreate the individual participant's stories into a complete narrative. I followed the retelling of each story by conducting member checks, where I asked the participants to read and provide feedback on her narrative. The final phase involved interpreting the participants' narrative around the context of the interview topics.

During phase one of data analysis, my goal in listening to the audio recording while reading through the transcription was to ensure I had thoroughly heard the participant and sought verbal cues where I felt the participant was settled or unsettled during our conversation. In phase two, I created the individual narratives from the transcripts. In the final phase, I identified the structure for presenting each woman's story, which is similar in the structure and progression of our interview conversations. While each woman's conversation developed on its own, I retold her story in a structured format. The format was outlined around six major areas—discussion regarding her path to the superintendency, professional networks, informal networks and mentorship, community connections, discussions around women in general related to barriers or stereotypes, and discussion around women related to discrimination or inequality. During this final phase, I read through each narrative twice using six different colored highlighters to annotate where discussion fell into the six categories described above.

Performing member checks. Before moving into the final phase, I sent each participant a copy of her transcript and narrative. I asked each participant to read through my interpretation of her story in order to ensure I had not misunderstood anything during the course of our conversation and to ensure that I was accurately retelling her narrative. I asked each woman to

confirm the accuracy of the narrative and to provide any corrections or comments as necessary. Because I knew these women had very busy lives, I asked each woman to respond by the end of a three-week deadline. Of the eight women participants, two had several clarifications they needed to make in order to better help me retell their stories. Of those two, one was very concerned her story was too transparent and asked that I work harder to ensure her anonymity. We had several email exchanges in which I provided her the opportunity to withdraw from the study. She chose to remain a participant. Two other participants had minor edits to their stories, and the remaining four participants made no requests for edits.

Research Quality

Valid and reliable knowledge presented in a professional and ethical manner was paramount to this study. Traditional approaches to validity and reliability, however, are redefined in narrative research. Reliability stemmed from the dependability of the data, while validity was achieved through the trustworthiness of the data (Polkinghorne, 1988). Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the terms credibility in place of validity. Narrative inquiry is more concerned with capturing and telling individual truths, and less concerned with traditional research approaches that are generalizable and easily replicated (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This section defines how credibility and dependability were achieved in this study.

Credibility and Dependability

One strategy employed in this research to maintain credibility was achieved through conducting member checks (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Riessman, 1993). Member checking allowed interviewed participants to validate my interpretation of the data and to provide feedback. This was conducted in two ways. The first was accomplished by having the participants read over their transcribed interviews. They were

encouraged to further clarify the perceptions of the experiences they shared with me and to provide any additional comments or feedback. The second method of member checking was accomplished by having the participants read over the drafts of their personal narratives as a recursive process toward negotiation meaning. I further sought their feedback as findings emerged (Merriam, 2009). Riessman (1993) stated member checking allows a researcher to not only find out what participants think of her work but also may allow their responses to be a source of future theoretical perspectives.

Dependability concerns whether the findings were consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). For this narrative inquiry, dependability of the research methods was achieved through the trustworthiness of notes, transcripts, and collected documents (Polkinghorne, 1988). Instead of using statistical data to report findings, the events of human experiences became the collected evidence (Polkinghorne, 2007). According to Riessman (1993), validation in narrative inquiry comes through the trustworthiness of interpretation—an interpretation becomes trustworthy when it is reasonable and convincing.

Ethical Considerations

The previous section concerning the validity and reliability of the study was dependent upon the researcher conducting the study in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009). Research ethics involves such issues as right to privacy, honesty and trust, harm and risk, and informed consent (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ethical considerations in this narrative inquiry were brought to light by asking “who has narrative privilege?” (Adams, 2008, p. 180). A researcher who uses a narrative medium to present the data must be aware of the control she has in (re) presenting others’ stories (Adams, 2008).

Informed consent to participate was obtained prior to beginning any interviews. Participants were made aware their participation was voluntary and withdrawal from the study would be granted if requested. The consent form is included in Appendix B. Extreme care was taken to protect the confidentiality of participants by not attributing identifiable data or comments in the findings (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, pseudonyms were used in the study to replace participants' real names, the names of individuals the women mentioned during their interviews, and for specific locations in Midwest State and other states. Not only was care taken to protect the identities of the women who contributed to the research project, but also just as important in the research quality was the accurate representation of the findings. Priessle (2007) stated

The ethic of representation is the good or ill that results from how participants are represented in publications, presentations, and other reports of research. Feminists have a particular stake in the ethics of representation because of what many of us believe to have been misrepresentations of women and our experiences. (p. 526)

Because this research is a critical look at how women access male-dominated networks in Midwest State superintendencies, harm and risk became a critical, ethical issue for the study. Extreme caution was taken to ensure any critical findings of the study could not be traced back to the participants. Honesty and trust were also imperative to this study. The women who participated in this study had to be able to find the researcher trustworthy and honest. Similarly, I trusted the participants were honest in their storytelling. Finally, approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained prior to commencement of the study.

Researcher Positionality

I have been an educator for the past 20 years. I was an English teacher at the middle, high school, and college level for 13 of those years. For seven years, I was an administrator of a small, rural junior/senior high school in central region of the state. Most recently, I became an assistant superintendent of a mid-sized school district. As I sit here reflecting, I immediately realize I have not progressed as far as I would have liked at this point in my career. Yet, I have to remember two things. One, I still have a lot of time to accomplish a great deal. Two, I have also served successfully for the past 29 years in the US Army and Army Reserve. While working as an educator, I have been deployed four different times, each for a year. My own personal experience has taught me that absence will limit the building of social capital and stymie the development of network relationships, which I personally believe are critical to attaining future administrative positions. As a principal with an eye toward a future superintendency, I began to ponder the path I should take to get there. While that by itself could have been a study, I chose instead to understand how women network in a male-dominated environment and if those networks in any way help a woman attain the superintendency.

I am also representative of a marginalized group as a female officer in the US Army, especially when it comes to women in command. So, when I was personally asked by the executive officer of the division to take command of their headquarters element, I was very surprised. Not only were there plenty of men from which to choose, there were men who also held the appropriate rank for the position. My rank at the time was one level below what the position required. While I did not inquire as to why I was chosen to lead, I do know that my success in that position and my ability to network with senior male officers allowed me to accumulate a wealth of social capital and propelled me to positions of greater responsibility.

Critical to the success of this research was not allowing my subjectivity or personal experiences to get in the way of understanding other women's experiences. As Noblit (1999) stated, I needed to work against myself and against my own values and identities. I had several assumptions about this research that I had to put aside. One assumption was women would refute the idea that social capital had any hand in their attaining a superintendency and would instead insist that it was human capital and their belief in the unbiased, formal application procedures that led to their being hired. At the same time, I assumed it took social capital resources to get ahead. Finally, while I do understand the experience of being a woman administrator, I have not yet had the experience of being a woman superintendent. I was careful not to transfer my experiences and assumptions into what I thought I was coming to understand about their experiences. Through member checking, I was able maintain the integrity of my data (Merriam, 2009).

The identity I had to work against in this study was not one of teacher or soldier but of woman. I could not separate my identity self from my research self. Therefore, I acknowledged I brought certain subjectivities to my research. By bracketing my subjectivities, I hopefully kept them from influencing my analysis and negating the authenticity of my study. A subjectivity I brought to the study was the notion that women were purposely kept on the periphery of power. While I did want to be conscious of not allowing my subjectivity to creep into the analysis when there is no evidence to substantiate it, I also did not want to be overly conscious that I overlooked the evidence when it did exist. As Harding (1987) stated, "the beliefs and behaviors of feminist researchers shape the results of their analyses no less than do those of sexist and androcentric researchers" (p. 9). As a woman researching women, I cannot deny that I am an advocate for woman and have a strong desire to advance women studies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

This chapter will discuss the findings from the interviews with eight women superintendents across Midwest State. The women in this study were all Caucasian and ranged in age from 45 to 59. On average, they have taught in the classroom for 13 years, were principals or assistant principals for 6 years, and were district office coordinators for 4 years. Two have been superintendents for more than 10 years; six of them have less than 6 years in the superintendency, with three being brand new to the superintendency at the time of their interview. On average, these eight women have 28 years of experience in education, ranging from 19 to 38 years. Three of the eight superintendents have an earned doctoral degree, two were working on their doctoral degrees at the time of the study, and three have earned their district-level professional license. In order to protect their confidentiality, I have given them pseudonyms: Dottie, Dorothea, Faye, Katherine, Gwyneth, Harriett, Shirley, and Peggy. Additionally, names and places have been changed throughout the women's narratives.

Dottie

A man may be able to walk into a room and make the first impression and automatically have [respect]. I don't think a woman can, even in a power suit. I think if a woman is patient and just always is steady and knows her stuff and has researched what she needs to know and has always proven to be [a competent] person that eventually it's like okay, she does know her stuff.

Introduction

Dottie is a Caucasian woman in her mid-50s, married to her college sweetheart, and working on her doctoral degree. She lives in a rural area of the state where she has been a superintendent of a small district for the last 10 years of her 30-year profession in public education. The population in her “A” sized school district is less than 500 students. During her career, Dottie spent 15 years as a teacher, 5 years as a principal, and 10 years as a superintendent. Dottie raised three sons while being a wife, teacher, coach, principal, and superintendent. Her two oldest sons are married and work on the family farm. Her youngest son attends college at a military academy.

Dottie grew up near a small town in the western area of the state, where her family owned and operated a large farming business. She and her two siblings attended a small K-12 school, in which she was very involved. “I did everything from all the sports to--you just name it probably and I was in it.” After graduating Valedictorian of her class, she traveled out of state to attend college on a basketball scholarship. She described the experience as “culture shock” and returned to home after only one year to attend a private four-year university. Today, Dottie is an executive board of trustee member at her college alma mater.

Dottie is a quiet woman with warm eyes and an easy smile. Her short, dark hair is lightly peppered with gray, making it difficult to believe she has been 30 years in the profession.

Path to the Superintendency

Dottie was perfectly content being a teacher and coach and had not set her sails for the superintendency. Yet, the subtle wind blows us in unforeseen directions, and often we are surprised to find that we have always been preparing for the destination.

Teacher and coach. *I met my husband while in college, and we got married right after graduation. We went to Colorado where I taught for a couple of years. And it was just kind of one of those deals where my husband wasn't sure whether or not he wanted to farm. So, we decided to strike out—you know—save the world. We left, and I taught math from fifth to twelfth grade. The school I taught at in Colorado was a really small school. Besides teaching, I was head coach of volleyball, basketball, and track—both boys and girls. At the end of two years, my husband decided he wanted to go home and farm with my brother and dad. So we moved back to the state in 1983.*

Whether it was serendipity, good timing, or great connections—I was offered a job teaching math and computers at the high school from which I graduated. I had applied earlier, before I knew we were moving to Colorado. The principal who was there was my principal and eighth-grade social studies teacher when I was in high school. I already started with my connections. So, when we were thinking about moving back, Mr. Stewart called me and said, “I still have your application. Are you even thinkin’ about comin’ back to the area?” His calling me sealed the deal because he had a math position and coaching positions. He offered me head coach of volleyball and girls’ basketball; that’s what I really wanted. It did not take much for me to make the decision to return home. Before you know it, I had been teaching here for 15 years when I was approached with the suggestion of being principal.

Good connections pave a smooth path. *I started getting my master’s degree, you know, you get to where you have to have hours to recertify your license. I got tired of just taking dummy hours, so I got into a Masters program for English as a Second Language (ESL) that was offered out west at a satellite campus. I finished the program and earned the hours I needed to recertify. I never really even thought about doing administration. I was a happy camper. I liked*

teaching. I liked coaching. I just had no desire and never thought about it, really. My principal walked down one day, came in, and sat down during my planning period to ask me if I'd ever thought about going into administration. I just told him, "No." I was pretty matter of fact about it. He told me the district superintendent was retiring, and he—Mr. Stewart—was moving up to take the superintendency. He said, "Our board has talked about it, and we want to try and bring somebody in the district up. And we've targeted you. How do you feel about it?" I honestly just had never put a thought into it. You just teach and coach. And you just do your job. So I told him I'd think about it. They brought me in and basically offered me the job. They told me they'd give me a year to certify. I didn't feel like I should start the position without having the background to be able to claim it.

I contacted a local regent university to see what it would take to get my administrative degree. I think my oldest son was in fourth or fifth grade. I just didn't think I wanted to go into administration with three kids. The school board asked me to come to their next meeting and visit with them about the job. You have to realize that when I went back to teach at my hometown, there were seven teachers there that had previously taught me. So that's really very strange. And they were great. I loved having them. They were super as peers. So, I went in and talked to the board a little bit about it. I really had a couple of concerns. One concern was if I didn't like it could I go backwards and return to the classroom. And the second concern was I just didn't know how it would work because I was a hometown girl. I'd been told it would either be fabulous, or it would be a nightmare. And I had a pretty good thing going and was fairly successful coaching and teaching, and I really just wasn't sure I wanted to let go of that.

But I started looking into what it would take to get my administrative degree. During this time, the Commissioner of Education was Terrence Able. He had once been a superintendent in

this district. This is where he started his superintendency. My dad served on the school board for 25 years, and he had hired Terrence. They were still really good friends then. In fact, my dad would go to Centerville when Terrence had something going on. So when I called the university, I found out that Dr. Davis up there—well, what I actually found out was that Terrence Able had gotten wind of my wanting to take classes for my administrative licensure. And somehow Dr. Davis and Terrence connected. I got the message back that I could complete the hours for my administrative degree in one summer; they would all be completed in the month of June if I came on campus. I obtained my principal's degree in one month. Now that I look back on it, there is no way I should've been able to do that.

At the time, you're not knowledgeable of that stuff—you know what I mean? To me, I was taking 12 hours in one month. Nine of the hours were in the classroom. And one class was by appointment. I thought that was what everybody was doing. So, I went up to the university and took the 12 hours I needed to take. I found out later what other people were doing to get their degrees. Talk about your connections! When I think about that, I really don't know how that connection happened.

I was given my administrative degree. I didn't even think it was really all that tough. I thought it would be a whole lot harder. So, I decided I'd try this—this whole principal thing. One of my concerns that I kept going back to was when my kids got older; there were things that I wanted to attend. And as a principal, you're supposed to be at school for everything. I started to realize I could go to everything—see my kids in band or whatever. And I kept thinking, "Well, this might pan out." The only other thing I thought was really interesting was I had gone into the board with an idea that I should earn about at least \$10,000 more than what I was currently making as a teacher. But the board actually offered me less than what I was making. They

hadn't done their homework. My coaching job along with my teaching job was financially better. I just told them no thank you and walked out the door. I don't know what the principal before me was making. I really don't. I never really looked that up, come to think of it. I just knew by the time I took on another month and half of a contract and more responsibilities—I just thought an increase in pay was probably fair. The school board invited me back to explain why I was so quick to just say “no thanks.” I explained it to them, and they were completely unaware. I found that kind of interesting. But, they gave me the increase in pay. So, I started in as principal, and my principal moved up to be the superintendent. I stayed on as principal for five years before finally accepting the superintendent's position.

Reluctant to be the superintendent. *Becoming the superintendent is kind of an interesting deal. My principal who had actually moved up to the superintendent position had left. And there was a time two years before that the board had talked to me about being his successor. I just didn't feel like I'd been a principal long enough, so I declined. Instead they hired the elementary principal who had his superintendent certification. I was in the process of getting my superintendency credentials, but at the time I had not completed it. I went to the elementary principal and said, “Are you interested at all in this? If you are, I'm just not going to do this. It's just too fast for me.” I didn't feel like I'd be a good mentor to principals who I would eventually hire. It just didn't feel right. So, I told the board that at some point I might be ready for the superintendency but not now. The board opened up the vacancy and did a full-fledged search. They did end up hiring the grade school principal. He was probably 15 years older than I was. However, a couple of years later, he suffered a heart attack and died. When he passed away, I had to step into his position and do double duty. It was kind of interesting because actually, I'm tryin' to think...I think it was March. It was just kind of one of those not real active*

times for a superintendent. Well, during spring break, they advertised for the superintendency. I told them, "You need to get somebody in here." That was my thought process. I had finished my superintendency degree. I hadn't really given it a whole lot of thought; I hadn't spent very much time as principal when you think of some of the careers of other principals. The board did advertise the position, and I even think they had one person they were interested enough in to make a hometown visit to their school district.

But, I did not apply for the job. The board president came to see me and said, "I know you have certification. Why have you not applied?" I just told him the higher up you go, the further away you get from the kids. When you feel like your mission is the kids, you wonder why you would go any further up. He asked me if I would go ahead and fill out an application and at least interview and talk to other superintendents to see if it might be a job in which I would be interested. And I thought I could at least do that. So, I filled out the application and interviewed with the board. I didn't ever interview with any teachers or anything like that. It was just with the board in a closed session. My high school principal who hired me as a teacher was a superintendent then in another school district. So I called him and said, "Okay, here's the scenario." His advice to me was that I should just go for it and never look back. He had a lot of impact on my life over the course of my career. I drove up to visit with him one afternoon. He talked to me about the superintendent responsibilities and how the job would be different for me. In his opinion, I would not be getting further away from the kids. He told me that I could have more influence on kids if I kept the kids' best interests at heart when working as the superintendent. So I came back, called the board president, and told him I was pretty interested in the job. The school board called a special meeting to talk with me in executive session. I told them I wanted permission to make internal personnel changes so I could put people in place

under me who had administrative experience. I did not want my job to be training new principals while I was trying to train myself. And we just talked a lot about those options. It's kinda funny. They just said, "Okay, okay, okay. Do what you think you need to do." And I really don't know if they didn't have another candidate they cared for, or if they didn't have one period. I don't know. I never asked. They offered me the job, and I accepted. I've been doing this job for the last ten years.

Community Connections

Dottie is an established member of her community not only because she has lived and worked in the same community her entire life but also because of her family's long-standing farming business. Her small town does not have a lot of business organizations in which she can belong, but that does not keep her from being actively involved in the community.

Coffee talk creates trust. *I do not belong to the Lions club or anything. I have belonged to the Chamber of Commerce on and off. What is sort of funny is we actually live between the town I work in and the neighboring district. The road on the west side of my house was the boundary for another school district, but my house is actually in my district. Because of that, we do a lot of business in the neighboring community. So I have been active in organizations in both school districts. I have been pretty active in my church more than anything as far as working with youth leaders. And in the school, of course, I worked with the letter club and coached. I've done about whatever has needed to be done. We don't have a lot of local groups in town. We have a Lions Club and a Chamber. Other than the church organizations, I join the Arts Council every year. It doesn't do a whole lot. You have the Chamber meetings that you go to once a month. A lot of my connections were made through*

coaching. The girls I was coaching basically connected me to their parents who were the cornerstones of the community at the time.

I went around speaking to groups. Basically, what I do is—in our town anyway, I eat at the Senior Center with my mom once or twice a month. I make sure that I check library books out once in a while because the Public Library Board is a group I might need at some point. We attend Chamber luncheons every month—my entire family does, my boys and their wives. I want the community to see all of us, not just me. One of my sons is on the Golf Board. Another one of them is on the Church Board and on the Chamber Board. I golf. So, I see a lot of people at the golf course. Even before that when my father was still alive—he passed away in 2007—he was at the coffee shop every morning. So, almost every morning, I would stop in and say hello to my father, who was with probably 10 or 11 people drinking coffee. And he would say to me, “They’re askin’ me about such and such. And I just don’t think they’re right. Tell ‘em what the big deal is.” And I would straighten them out. They also had a coffee drinking deal for the men. It was actually at the old folks’ home. Dad would go down there when he was on the school board, and he would drink coffee with those older men. And he started having me come there once a month to just tell them what the school was doing. So the connections actually were very easy.

There is a need for me to stay connected to the taxpayers of the community. It’s been interesting because we just had a whole scenario that I needed people from seven different organizations to support me in an endeavor I was going up against with the county commissioners. We have a windmill farm that’s going in up north. And they’re not taxed. But they give what’s called “pilot money payment” in lieu of taxes. The entire windmill farm is in my school district. And there are only two schools in the county. But the money is going to the

county commissioners. The intention of the wind farm was for the money to be distributed back to the local property tax payers. And there were seven entities in the city that were poised to reap the benefits. It's almost \$200,000 to the school district every year for 20 years. And to the other six entities, it's a great deal of money. The county commissioners were not going to distribute it. So, I went to every one of these boards and said, "I need your help. And here's a spreadsheet of how it would be divided over the next 20 years. You need to know how much money we're talking about and exactly what your organization would get. And I need your support." A week ago Monday, when a lot of people were off work for a snow day, I had 26 people show up at the courthouse to support me on the bill. I was floored. I was expecting a dozen. And key people came to me. I was just shocked when some of them walked in; they are people who have been highly respected in the community for a long time. I presented my proposal and had a few people speak on behalf of the proposal. They were thanking me over and over again for putting this spreadsheet together for them. The spreadsheet was easy for me to do, and do you know how difficult the bill would have been to get through if it had not been for those people in the community. Trust is a mutual thing in a small community like that. I actually think they trust me.

Professional Networks

Dottie's resume highlighting her professional networks is impressive for someone who lives and works in such a remote area of the state. She has served as a Member of the Board of Trustees at her university alma mater for four years; served on the Board of Directors for the state's superintendent association for two years; served as member of the state's superintendent council for four years; and served on the state high school activities association executive board for two years.

My mentors were mostly men. *I always stayed in touch with the principal who hired me. He supported me a lot over the years. I was also on the executive board for the state high school activities association. Another male superintendent on that board actually came out and helped me set my first budget and walked me through it. There were several people on the state activities board who I'd sit down with at conferences and seek their guidance on issues. And they would talk me through some of the solutions.*

My mentors and supporters were mostly men. There were few women administrators in my area. Additionally, the state activities association board members were mostly men. In fact, the reason I was on the executive committee was they needed a woman. And they needed a superintendent. So I filled both of those slots for them. You know, they have to have one woman, and they have to have one minority. Or they need one superintendent and one board of education member—you know. And if one person can fill two or three slots, they do it.

Some of my best supporters as a principal—and even when I became the superintendent—were the teachers who taught me. It was like they wanted me to succeed. One of my teachers retired and later became my board president for several years. It was great working with him because I never stopped learning from him.

We had a group that was called Superintendents Nuts and Bolts. This was during my first year in the superintendency. The idea of it was to have some experienced superintendents mentor some of us younger, inexperienced ones. When one of them said, “Do you have any questions?” I actually had a notebook where I had two written two pages of everything that had happened to me so far. You know, like when certain forms are due. How in the world do you figure that out? But I have to hand it to them—the experienced superintendents. They were supportive. One of them was the superintendent at a large school district in the western area of

the state. He was awesome. I started going through my list and said, “Just tell me when you get tired.” He replied, “No, you finish every question on that page.” To this day, he’ll just stop in and check on me. He’s actually a pretty amazing person.

Wendy Devonshire, a lawyer at the state school boards association, was a huge help to me. When I went into my superintendency, I had no idea what all had happened before I got there. We didn’t have administrative meetings. As administrators we were kind of on our own. It was terrible. There were about six grievances when I took over as superintendent. I had no clue. Wendy laughed because she said she had used my superintendency as an example at several different conferences. I had more things happen in the first year of my superintendency. I do not know how I didn’t go backwards. She was a pretty key connection as far as walking me through a lot of issues that I normally would not have had a clue on. Things like teachers being taken away in handcuffs—unusual things that have never happened since then. Those people were really pretty key to my success.

A chance to be council chair. *Until I started in my doctoral program, probably the organization that I spent a lot of time with was the Midwest State School Superintendent’s Association (MSSSA) board. I was really just getting into knowing how that organization worked. As a board member, I very rarely missed a MSSSA meeting. And there were people missing them all the time. Last year, I was supposed to chair the council of superintendents in Centerville that meets once a month. However, due to my graduate classes, I could not attend the meetings and had to give up the opportunity to chair the council.*

I had been going to the council of S=superintendent meetings for a while. And even though I live in a remote area of the state far from where the meetings were taking place, I really think the difference in them choosing to ask me to chair it was because I was dependable. I get so

mad at people, usually men because there aren't many women superintendents. I feel when you commit to something like the MSSSA board—a board where you must attend State Board of Education (SBOE) meetings every so often as a representative—you should honor your commitment and show up. I would sign up for those kinds of things. And sometimes there was a board meeting on Monday night and I'd drive part way to get there and get up early the next morning and all that kind of thing because I thought it was important if I said I would be there that I would be there. I was responsible for reporting back to the constituents in my area. I don't think people that are closer to Centerville probably take it as seriously. In my mind, it was important for my presence to be there and for them to know that I wanted to be involved. I let them know I knew what I was doing and all they had to do was ask me. If they know I am committed, then when they need someone from my area of the state and they really want somebody who will be actively engaged—they know I will be there regardless of the drive. I believe that is why they asked me to chair the council.

When I go to the council of superintendents meetings, I try to be there every month. The meeting usually started at 2:00. I'd drive to Centerville. I'd stay at the meeting from 2:00 until like 6:00 or 7:00. And I would drive all the way home so I was back in district the next day. It's about five and a half hours. When you're from a small school, you see the big-school people walk in who have been on TV. And people just know them and expect them to know what they're doing. When you are from a small school, you've gotta make a statement. And that involves being a woman also. I don't do the power suit. So, I have to do something else to make a statement. Your presence has got to be at those meetings. Then people realize you want to be involved. And I believe this region of the state is important. So, I take that pretty seriously because it's my hometown. My grandkids are going to grow up here.

Unsettled Talk

In the early years of Dottie's superintendency, she eagerly approached the job unaware that she might one day question board policies or actions.

With experience comes wisdom. *You have to get a little bit of experience under your belt before you start looking outside yourself and really evaluating your circumstances. The first two or three years of my superintendency were like survival mode. But now there are some things that really bother me. I am a woman superintendent in my hometown. I have people serving on my board who know that I came from the middle-class. And a woman definitely shouldn't be making more than I am as a farmer or whatever the case may be. You really stop and compare some things. I know it has to do with being a female. A few years ago when the money started dropping in education, we froze our administrative salaries willingly for a couple of years. When the money kind of started coming back, it didn't start coming back in the administrative end of it. My elementary principal is also a female. Our secondary principal who is male always seems to fare not just in dollar signs. In my opinion, and I think even if you ask the board, he's probably the weakest of the three administrators. And yet, if you figured out the salary over the course of working months, he actually only makes about \$30.00 a month less than I do when you figure my 12 months. Sometimes I like to think that they just don't think about 12 months or 11 months. But I have put it in front of them. I've talked to them about it.*

There gets to be a point where I don't know how you combat it. For me, where my husband farms—I will say I could go someplace else. I'd probably have to drive 30 minutes. I just don't know that I want to do that. I don't think I should have to either. There's very little on my evaluation that is positive or negative. The board just kind of sits there and looks at me like—you're doing a great job; we just don't worry about you.

Respect is earned over time. *When I first started in as the superintendent, I'm not sure [my peers] thought I probably would have much to add to a conversation. Every time I would go to Centerville there were people in—well, women basically, I think they feel like they have to wear these power suits and stuff. That's just not me. I probably should make it me. And it's just not. I don't even own one. It's kind of crazy. I was just who I was. And if they didn't think I had much to say because of it, that's fine, too. I think in the last three or four or maybe even five years—I can ask a lot of questions, and I get a lot of phone calls from people. I think it's one of those things that a man may be able to walk into a room and make the first impression and automatically have [respect]. I don't think a woman can, even in a power suit. I think if a woman is patient and just always is steady and knows her stuff and has researched what she needs to know and has always proven to be that person, that eventually it's like okay, she does know her stuff. Let's visit with her.*

I don't think I have ever felt excluded from a group. Sometimes in a rural school—although, I'm sure this happens all over the place—you get excluded a little bit because the larger schools dominate the smaller schools. I do know even when I was just a member of the state activities association there was a clique with the executive board members. You don't realize how much of a clique it is until they come to you as a woman and need you as a “woman” superintendent to serve on their executive board. And although it's very well run, it's definitely almost an exclusive club type thing.

Where are the women superintendents? *I don't know why there aren't more women superintendents. Today we were at the legislative forum. I was the only woman superintendent there. There was an assistant superintendent there who was a woman. I'd say there were 25 or 26 administrators at the forum.*

I think women get caught up in their own stereotype. Teaching is a nine-month profession. They have their summers off with their kids, their holidays off with their kids. And they just lock themselves in a box like that. They don't have somebody outside, whether it's their spouse or another superintendent or someone who encourages them. You know, someone who tells them, "You can do this." This is all doable. In fact, my kids stopped in after lunch and got candy out of the candy bowl and brought three kids with them. And then they were out the door. It's all good. But women don't see that. They see a 12-month position. They see a lot of stress, a lot of handling issues. They don't see the flipside; that it's doable with a family. So, what happens is they just don't do it. They lock themselves in this box. Sometimes, I do blame women for or not encouraging other women.

Dorothea

I have never felt restricted. I don't see men and women. I just see people. I never felt that I was being treated differently because I was a female. I really did not. And I treat everybody the same. I just don't feel that way at all. Are there fewer females when I go to a meeting? Absolutely. But that's just the way it is. It is what it is. I don't think of myself as a female superintendent. I think of myself as a superintendent.

Introduction

Dorothea is a Caucasian woman in her late fifties, married, with one daughter. She obtained her Ph.D. in educational administration in her late thirties and has been in education for 38 years. She is currently the superintendent of a suburban school district in the northeastern area of the state with a student population between 5,000 and 6,000 students. Over the course of her career, she was a teacher for 9 years, an assistant principal and principal for 7 years, a district

office administrator for 5 years, and a superintendent for 17 years. Dorothea is different from the other participants, as her career path did not start in Midwest State. Instead, she sought her first teaching contract in the Southern Hemisphere.

Dorothea was born in a small community in the northwestern area of the state where her grandparents and great-grandparents farmed. After fifth grade, her family moved to the central area of the state for her father's job. The oldest of six kids, Dorothea graduated high school in central Midwest State and remained close to the area to attend college at a state regent university.

Dorothea is tall and slim with light-brown, short hair. She is always professionally dressed. I found her to be a passionate and dedicated superintendent. She talks at lightning speed, which I imagine is also how she goes about her business.

Path to the Superintendency

Dorothea accepted her first teaching job in the 1970s in the same manner, passion, and no-holds-barred approach as she did every subsequent job leading her to the superintendency.

Setting sail for overseas. *In the '70s, a country in the Southern Hemisphere had a deficit of teachers because they changed their certification process. Some of my friends accepted teaching positions there. I told my parents, "I think I'm going to interview with that country because there are two states coming to the campus to interview. I think I'm gonna do that. And whoever offers me a contract first, that's where I'm going." They looked at me like, "Really?" "Yeah, I really am." And I did! I went to the Southern Hemisphere and taught school in the suburbs of a large city for two years. I loved every single minute of it! It was the first time I had ever been on a plane. I flew to San Francisco to Hawaii to the Southern Hemisphere. I taught there for two years. I came back a couple times and did a lot of traveling – a lot of traveling! I came back once for a five-week cruise around the world. I went to the Suez Canal when the*

Russians still controlled it. That was pretty interesting. So to me, leaving the country to teach was one of the key events in my life; it changed who I was and how I viewed the world. Having to spend two years learning how to assimilate into a new culture made me much more adaptable. It was interesting, and I loved every minute of it.

But two years later, at the beginning of April, I was back home and jobless. I had not yet found a job, and I needed one. So, I immediately went to work for a large urban school district. They had an opening for a long-term substitute. I ended up teaching three years for them. From there, I met my husband and started working on my Masters.

First offer, first acceptance. *I haven't taught in many districts. I earned my Masters while I was working at Travis School District. Once I finished my degree, I started looking for an assistant principal position. I didn't want to go right into a principalship because I didn't really feel prepared for that. I'm a middle school person; that's my favorite age group to work with. Littleton had an assistant principal opening that was within commuting distance, so I applied. I interviewed there, as well as a couple of other districts. I decided whoever offered me a position first is where I would go. That is how I have patterned my life. Littleton offered first, and so off I went to be an assistant principal at the junior high. I stayed there for seven years as assistant principal and building administrator. While there, I started working on my doctorate. Once I finished my doctorate, I became the assistant superintendent. I worked in that district for 12 years. I learned a lot about building level administration and central office administration. At the end of 12 years, I had my doctorate and five years of experience as an assistant superintendent. I was ready for a change.*

Bound for the northeastern seaboard. *My husband's family is from the East Coast. I knew I would never be a superintendent in Littleton school district as long as the superintendent*

was there because he was my age. I figured he would stay there until he retired. I'm thinking, "Well, I have to go somewhere different if I want to be a superintendent." And by this time, I did want to be a superintendent. So, we decided we would try and do a good thing for the family as well as for my career. And my husband was willing to do that. I started looking on the East Coast. I interviewed in three different districts in three different states along the northeastern seaboard. Once again, I decided whoever offered me the first contract is where I would work. I flew back and forth several times. You just have to make the commitment to do that. I really enjoyed the interview process. Do you know where Mystic Seaport is? It's beautiful. And it's like man, that's a great community. But I wasn't offered that position. I interviewed in New Hampshire. And again, I didn't know much about the community other than what I found on Google because I'm not from that area. I liked the community. But after I interviewed there, I didn't really care if I was offered the position because I didn't really care for the people I interviewed with. The third interview was in Massachusetts. I loved the group of people at Hampton-Wilshire school district; they were great. The school district is a lot like where I am now—two towns creating a unified district. Hampton is a small town, while Wilshire is a larger one. I loved everything about the district and community. Luckily, they were the first ones to offer me a contract. Hampton-Wilshire had a student population of approximately 3,500 students. I was there for five years as superintendent.

Likability factor. *Any time you go in to interview with a board of education, and I've done that several times, I think it is really a personality thing as much as anything else on who they choose. It's how they perceive you; the likability factor is huge, I think. Are they going to like you? Are you going like them? And are you answering the questions the way that they would want their next superintendent to answer them? Are they looking for somebody with*

strong instructional leadership or one who has had the experience of opening a full-day kindergarten program? School boards always have a list of issues with which they are hoping a new superintendent can fix. If you do a little bit of research, you can figure out what those issues might be.

Both the superintendents I followed had been retiring. Both were well established in the community—almost beloved. For instance, at Hampton-Wilshire the previous superintendent had been there for 17 years. His five children had grown up in the community. I was much different from him, yet a lot like him in many ways. The board did not seem uncomfortable that I came from another state. I convinced them I was competent. First of all, I let them know I could assimilate well into a new culture. Because I had lived overseas for two years, I think that helped alleviate any fears they may have had that I was only going to come for a year, hate it, and leave. I had already experienced doing well living away from home.

The family is all in. *My daughter was in fifth grade when we decided to move, and she was okay with the idea. My husband was ready to move also. He is ten years older than I am, which might make a difference to other couples. He already had his master's degree and had moved up the corporate ladder. He was ready for a break. He had been a corporate credit manager for years and years and years. He was tired of all the things he had to do that were really messy, like laying people off and closing plants. He goes, "Ya know, I'd love to be a realtor. This might be a perfect opportunity for me to step back and do something I'd really love to do." So, that's what he did.*

Not a rural superintendent. *I am starting my twelfth year here. We were in Hampton-Wilshire for five years when my daughter became a freshman in high school. There were two things at play when I decided to move back to Midwest State. One was personal, and one was*

professional. I knew eventually I wanted to come back to Midwest State. But I didn't want to go to western Midwest State. I was born in that area, and I love the western part of the state. But, I'm not a rural superintendent. It's just not who I am. I can be urban. I can be suburban. But, I am not rural. And I don't think I would do a very good job in that role. So, I was looking for a suburban district. I had five years under my belt in Hampton-Wilshire, and I felt ready to make another move. My family was ready also. So, I started looking at vacancies. The year I was looking, most of the vacancies were not suburban. Instead, there were a lot of vacancies in very small, rural districts. All my family in Midwest State lives in the eastern geographic area of the state. I really wanted to be geographically situated to get together with my family.

Conference connections. *I stumbled upon the Wellsville-Anthony school district superintendent advertisement. I was at the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conference. I have been a member for many, many years. And I was looking at their vacancy list. They have this whole section on finding a job. I'm looking and thinking, "Hey, I know the superintendent of that district; it's Henry." And Henry happened to be there at the conference as he was also doing some superintendent recruiting for a consulting firm.*

I found Henry and visited with him. "Tell me about Wellsville-Anthony. I'm kind of interested. I didn't realize you were retiring. Do they already have someone in mind to replace you?" I also knew the assistant superintendent there, and I had deep, abiding respect for him. I felt he might be a shoe-in for the superintendency. But Henry said, "No, Dr. Percy is not automatically the next superintendent. If he wants the job, he has to apply and go through the process." I asked, "Do you think it would be worth it for me to apply?" He replied, "Absolutely. You've been a superintendent. You have Midwest roots. You've got a doctorate. I encourage you. You really need to apply. I think it might be worth your while." I then went to the B&R

consulting firm at the conference because they were the ones leading the recruiting effort for Wellsville-Anthony. I visited with them for a while and asked, "What do you think? I don't want to go through all this effort and cause turmoil in Hampton-Wilshire if there truly is someone the district is already considering as a candidate. Do they already have their minds made up?" They said, "No, I don't think they have. I think you ought to apply." So I did! I told the board in Hampton-Wilshire I had applied for the position. I had been there five years and loved every minute of it. But I really needed to get back home. I felt I needed to get back to Midwest State for my family and for my retirement.

I applied to Wellsville-Anthony. In March 2001, I went through a full-day interview process. I was heavily screened prior to even being invited for a face-to-face interview with the board and various other groups in the district. I interviewed with the classified staff, with the patrons in the community, with the teachers, and during lunch with all the administrators. I took a tour of the district and then had an evening interview with the board that lasted for three hours.

Experience pays dividends. *I was offered the job, and I accepted. I loved everyone I met. The board had a lot of issues in the district they were trying to improve. They wanted to know if I had any experience with construction. It just so happened that I had opened three buildings in Hampton-Wilshire because it was a growing district. The school board did their homework. They talked to the architects, the board attorney, and the district teachers. The board asked if I had ever had a grievance? I had not. They asked if I was a negotiator and if I sat at the table? Yes, I do. So, those were all positives in the plus column. They wondered if I knew anything about starting all-day kindergarten programs. I had just opened up full-day kindergarten in Hampton-Wilshire. All my experience was there and easily translated to what they wanted to accomplish here. It just really worked out well for me.*

My district covers 128 square miles. I have six thousand students. We're more suburban than urban, and we're growing. And that's a good thing. When I came in 2001, we had five thousand kids. We now have six thousand kids 12 years later. Increasing enrollment is a very good thing. Plus, we just completed a \$67 million bond project.

Reflecting on the journey. *I have done a lot of district curriculum work. I probably could have moved into a superintendency much faster than I did, but I always wanted to know as much as I could first. I didn't start out wanting to be a superintendent. It just kind of evolved. I did not start out as a teacher saying I wanted to be a principal either. Things just evolve the more you get involved in projects in the building or in the district. I love being involved. People come to you and say, "Well, have you considered such and such?" And I would say, "No, but I guess I could."*

I would not have pursued my doctorate if it were not for the superintendent in Littleton who said, "I'd really like you to get your doctorate and maybe think about taking the assistant superintendent position." I was like, "Get my doctorate? Okay, I guess I can do that." And I just kept moving up. I just wasn't that conscious about it. Sometimes, you do things almost unintentionally. I did not intend to be a superintendent when I started out working on my Masters. I did like administration, and I really liked curriculum instruction—which led me to the central office. It took me five years in central office to learn all those jobs. What a great place to learn what it means to be a superintendent. Here's what I think being a superintendent is: knowing a little bit about a lot of things. Some superintendents are very intentional about planning their careers. I was just an assistant principal, then a principal, then an assistant superintendent, and then finally a superintendent. That's the path I fell into. I did the job I had and that led me to the next job, but I never had this big plan. I've loved every job I've ever had.

Community Connections

Dorothea is very involved in her community's professional organizations. Throughout her career, she has been a member of the United Way Executive Board; vice-president of membership for the Boys Scouts of America; chair of the area technical school advisory board; member of Junior Achievement, board member for the Family Service and Guidance Center; member of Rotary Club; board member for Advisory Group on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and member of the Chamber of Commerce.

Commitment, connections, and credibility. *One of the things I would say about Massachusetts that I learned very quickly was how important it is to belong. You really need to belong to organizations so people get to know you, whether you're a female or a male coming into a new community or a new superintendency. I joined Rotary and became very, very involved. I volunteered for many committees. I became the treasurer, the secretary, and the vice-president. I was going to be the first female president, but I had made the decision to return to the Midwest so I did not stay and serve in the position. I believe in what Rotary does—service to the community. I was working with and meeting regularly with people who I might not have otherwise come in contact with, especially since they did not have kids in the school district.*

When I was in Massachusetts, I attended our county commissioner meetings. They are regular countywide governance meetings, and I would always make sure I was there because the previous superintendent didn't really attend those. I thought, "You know what? They fund part of our budget. They probably might want to see me to make sure I'm interested in what they're doing." If I need something from them, they'll remember, "Oh yeah, we know Dorothea." So I try to build relationships with people by being present and visible. I joined professional and superintendent organizations in Massachusetts. I've been a member of the national organization

for a long time. I started getting involved with the Massachusetts Association for Superintendents. I just asked people what could I do to become more involved. I went to all of their regional meetings. I went to their state meetings. I introduced myself to folks. What can I do? Can I host something? Do you ever have a need for somebody to host a meeting? It was important that I reached out and did the whole networking thing. But, I was also doing it because I needed to know who the power players were in the state. I knew where they were in the state, but I didn't know who they were.

The superintendent in Springfield, Massachusetts, you would think would be a part of our regional meetings. But he wasn't because the urban districts had their own group. Therefore, Springfield, Boston, and Pittsfield were all in their own little group. I reached out to the Springfield superintendent, Nathan Potter. Today, he is senior vice-president of Relationship Development at the College Board. He was a very suave and polished individual. I wanted to connect with him because of his ability to communicate so effectively with the media. He and I were on a radio program together. Those were the connections that really helped me become a part of that community, and I believe helped my credibility.

Professional Networks

When Dorothea accepted her superintendent position in Midwest State, it was the outgoing superintendent, Henry, who took her around to meetings and introduced her and helped her make connections. I consider Dorothea to be one of the power players in the state's educational circles. She has a long list of professional memberships: Chair of the United School Administrators (USA) Legislative Committee; Chair of the Midwest State School Superintendent Administrators (MSSSA) Council of Superintendents; Chair of the MSSSA State Board of Education Monitoring Committee; member of AASA and elected to the governing board;

member of the School Finance Task Force; President of MSSSA; and honored as Superintendent of the Year.

Mentorship. *When I came to Wellsville-Anthony, Henry did a very, very nice job of helping me transition into the district. The board gave him ten days to be a consultant for me. He said, "There's some things you need to go to. I will take you and introduce you to the group." One group he introduced me to was the County Council of Superintendents. They have a lunch meeting once a month. He goes, "I'll introduce you to all the superintendents. I'll take you to the first meeting." He did that for me. Additionally, he took me to my first Council of Superintendents meetings at the state education department. The meeting consisted of superintendents from all over the state who met seven times a year. He goes, "You do not have to be an appointed member of the Council of Superintendents to attend, but you do have to attend. That is where you get all the good information before anybody else." He really helped me make connections.*

Getting my foot in the door. *In order to be a member of the Council of Superintendents, you must first get appointed by the Midwest State School Superintendents Association (MSSSA). It was at those meetings where I did probably advocate a little bit for myself. Even if I were not a member of the council, I would attend their meetings. Those meetings are where you get to know the superintendents across the state. There are people who are appointed to that committee that you only get to see once a month because they're coming from all over the state. I introduced myself to the MSSSA President. At the next meeting, I'd say, "So, I'd like to get more involved in MSSSA? How do I do that? I don't know enough about it. How do I do that?" You make yourself known. Sometimes I would just ask if I could serve on a committee, or if there was something I could do, or if somebody needed something. I was happy to do whatever.*

Eventually, they start remembering and thinking, “Well, Dorothea said she’d be willing to help out. Let’s see if she’d do this.” I started getting more committee work. Finally, I was asked if I wanted to serve on the board. Of course, I said I would love to. That is how I got my foot in the door.

I am on a lot of boards. I am on boards because I believe in what they are doing. And because I believe it is my responsibility as a school superintendent in this community to be visible and available and to show my support both financially and through my involvement. I am on a lot of community boards. I am ex-officio on the Chamber Board. I am on the Expansion Committee of the Junior Achievement Board. Junior Achievement is in all of the buildings in my district. We are trying to expand it across the state. It is a great organization. They have volunteers who go into the classroom and teach financial literacy and economics. I love that board. I have been on the Boy Scouts Board for about six years. I am so glad they changed their position on gay members. We have a gay-straight alliance at the high school. We have gay teachers. I decided I was not taking a position against what we support in this district, so I was prepared to resign from the Boy Scouts board.

I was on the United Way Board for many, many years. But you can only serve two four-year-terms. I love what United Way does for this community. It is all just very important to me—all those organizations that help families at risk. These are great organizations in which to belong. I am on the Juvenile Justice Board. If we can get students in the juvenile system a diploma, it will be so positive for them. I believe in everything they are doing. I belong to the Family Service and Guidance Center Board. They advocate for the mental health of our youth in the community. They are a great board. I have to go off next year because I cannot be on that board any longer. It provides services for kids ages 5 to 17. I just believe in everything they’re

doing. I did not join Rotary when I came back to Midwest State because I just didn't have time. They meet every Friday at 7:30 in the morning. I have committee meetings at 7:30 in the morning, so I just couldn't do it. There are times when I just have to say I cannot do more.

Unsettled Talk

Dorothea did not struggle to talk about women as superintendents and their lack thereof. She stated matter of fact, "It is what it is."

It is not for lack of desire. *I would love to see more female superintendents. I think females bring change. I only have one female board member. But when we have females at the board table, the discussion changes. I think it is a richer discussion. I would like to see more minorities. We do not have an African American or Hispanic or American Indian on our board. I do not have a principal who isn't Caucasian. I would love to see more diversity everywhere.*

I think part of the issue with the women I talk to about moving up is what they have going on in their lives at the time. It seems the desire to progress in their career is there, but sometimes there are other things going on in women's lives that just do not allow them to be superintendents. They are not mobile. Their family is not willing to move. You have to have some mobility. Or they do not want the pressures and the stress. I get phone calls morning, noon, and night. We have a protection alarm system in the district. I should not be the first one being called, which I'm not. But eventually, I am called if they can't find anybody. So I get the call at two o'clock in the morning that the alarm is going off at the elementary school. It's a lot of responsibility. And if they have other things in their lives that are pulling on them, it's just – it is a high-stress job. And you have to be willing to deal with those pressures and be able to manage it well. I do not think it is due to a lack of confidence. I just think it is not right for some women at a certain point in their lives. There are many though that it is right for. There was a

female assistant superintendent who was at Hampton-Wilshire when I got there. She did a great job. She actually wanted to be a superintendent. She applied for a superintendency in a small town in Massachusetts and got the job. I was very, very happy for her. There are some fabulous women superintendents out there.

The first female superintendent. *I have never felt restricted. I do not see men and women; I just see people. I never felt that I was being treated differently because I was a female. I really did not. And I treat everyone the same. I just do not feel that way at all. Are there fewer females when I go to a meeting? Absolutely. But that's just the way it is. It is what it is. I do not think of myself as a female superintendent. I think of myself as a superintendent. And I think that makes all the difference in the world. I was the first female superintendent in Hampton-Wilshire. I never felt it was an issue or a problem. There was one other female superintendent in my region, and we'd go to meetings regularly. We were part of the special education co-op. Suzanne was the superintendent in West Springfield who went to many, many meetings with me. We were the only two female superintendents. She was like me—we were just superintendents. There were nine superintendents who would meet once a month in our region, and Suzanne and I were the only females. I will tell you that in Massachusetts and on the East Coast, you find more female superintendents than you do in the Midwest. When you would go to these statewide meetings and these regional meetings, there were more female superintendents.*

There isn't anything I will not do. There isn't anything that I cannot do just because I am a female that a male counterpart can do. I just do not think of myself that way. I just go in and do my job and do it to the best of my ability. The one thing I think helped me along the way is that I did not have an ego. I do not let ego ever drive anything I do. I will mop a floor. If it needs to be mopped, give me the mop. Unfortunately, you are going to find—and I think this is

absolutely true, although, I have nothing but anecdotal evidence on this—there are certain things men absolutely will not do. And I am like, are you kidding? Give me the mop. You just treat people the way you would want to be treated. And you do not ever define people by their title, or by their position, or by their rank. We're all people. That makes a big difference.

Faye

I kind of get tickled for being the first woman superintendent here. That's been pretty interesting, but really it's not about my way. I am very collaborative. I do have a vision of where we want to go and what we want to do, but I know a lot of people shape it as we go along and it doesn't have to be all about me. And I don't have to be taking the credit; somebody else can be out there getting credit.

Introduction

Faye is starting her third year as the first woman superintendent of the sixth largest school district in the state. The student population of her urban AAA school district is approximately 14,000 students and is located in the northeastern region of the state. Her district is comprised of three high schools, six middle schools, and seventeen elementary schools. Eight additional buildings provide education for students ranging from pre-school age to adults.

Faye is a Caucasian woman in her mid to late fifties, married, and the mother of three children. She has been in education for more than 30 years and completed her doctorate in administration approximately 13 years ago. Faye was a classroom teacher for 11 years and an elementary principal for four years. The majority of her career, approximately 11 years, was spent working at the district level as an area superintendent or deputy superintendent responsible for human resources and curriculum instruction. Prior to taking on the responsibilities of an

interim superintendent, which led to her current superintendency, she worked at the State Department of Education. Most interesting about Faye is she has worked in public education as a district-level administrator in four different states.

Faye grew up in a middle-class family in the western part of the state where her mother taught in a one-room schoolhouse. Faye never doubted she would attend college. She considered herself an ordinary student with natural leadership abilities.

Path to the Superintendency

Faye's route to the superintendency took a short detour through motherhood, wound through several neighboring states, and circled through a roundabout bringing her back to where it all began. Throughout her various jobs, she always stayed in touch with people with whom she had previously worked. Those connections and friendships helped her move along in her career.

From teacher to state department guru. *My mother said, "I went to community college, it'll be good for you to go." There was never talk about going any place bigger than community college. I went to the local community college my first year, while my brother was attending a four-year university on the eastern side of the state. Near the end of my first year, I came back and announced, "I'm going to the university," not thinking that it might be a problem or be financially limiting for my parents to have two children attending. My sophomore year, I left my hometown for the university 350 miles away.*

Just before leaving, I met a man—my future husband—and fell head-over-heels in love. I then decided I would return home at the end of my second year. And so it was. I came home and got married the next fall. I returned to college at a local, private university that summer. I was working full-time as a Title 1 para-educator, going to school four nights a week, and taking

classes on Saturdays to pick up hours. I continued working as a para, went to college full-time through the end of the following summer, and student taught for six weeks. I finished my degree in three years. Now that I think back on it, who student teaches in six weeks, really? Seriously?

Choosing motherhood. The school where I student taught had a job opening in January, and I stepped into that position and began my career. I landed a job when times were tough back in the '70s. It was kind of like where we are now—the economy was bad so people were holding onto their jobs. There just were not a lot of other options, so I was really lucky to have finished college early and landed a teaching job. I taught four years and had my son at the end of my third year. After having him, I reduced my hours to teaching halftime in a Title I classroom. When I became pregnant with my daughter, I stopped teaching altogether and just stayed home for seven years while my children were young. As soon as they started school, I went back to teaching full time.

Graduate degrees. After getting back into the classroom, I realized some things just had not changed. I went back to the same building I was previously teaching in and worked with the very same principal. However, what had changed significantly was education. You know, it had never even dawned on me before to be a principal. If it would have, I would have been working on my Masters while I was home with those kids. When I came back, everything in education was different. Schools were accredited in a completely new way. Quality Performance Accreditation (QPA) was being implemented and now being a building principal was more about leading classroom instruction and less about being a manager. I thought, “Maybe I’d like to do that.” So I ended up starting on my Masters, and I finished it in 1993. Five years later, I began working on my doctorate, which was really a whimsical decision.

A friend called me and said, “Faye, I’m thinking about going to the university to work on my doctorate.” And I said, “Oh? I’ll go with you!” And that was the total thought I had given to doing it. She basically called me and said she was looking for someone she could carpool with. A man would probably think, “Now what will this cost me? How will this impact my family?” But I just jumped on it and went. It was a little spontaneous. At that time, I knew a fellow male educator who took off a year to work on his doctorate and his wife supported him. Now wouldn’t that be nice, seriously? My husband would have said, “No way!”

Denied principalship, offered assistant superintendent. *I taught a few more years while I worked on my Masters, and then I applied for a job in my district. I really wanted to be a building principal and there were several openings that year. I felt very confident I would be the next principal. But the district leadership called and said, “We’d like you to be the staff development coordinator for the district.” It was a new position being created by a new superintendent. The assistant superintendent thought I would be good at curriculum, so he pulled me out of the classroom and talked me into taking on the new role. I was the district staff development coordinator for two years. By this time, the director of instruction quit in October so the leadership bestowed upon me the position of acting director of instruction about the same time standards were being developed throughout K-12 public education. Eventually, I went from acting director of instruction to the actual assistant superintendent of instruction.*

Followed my husband. *Then everything changed. Two of my children had graduated from high school and my husband took a job transfer—we took a transfer with his job—in Oklahoma. I left my job as assistant superintendent in Midwest State and became the director of instruction and curriculum at a large public school in Oklahoma comprised of 14,000 students.*

It was a great job and a great place to live. Then the business my husband worked for went bankrupt.

We were only in Oklahoma for a year before we moved to Texas for his job. The district I worked for in Texas was about half the size as the one in Oklahoma. I started in Texas the following year as the director of elementary programs for a district of 7,500 students. However, the company my husband worked for once again went bankrupt. He ended up being sent back to a small town in southwest Midwest State to work. I just could not fathom moving there after living in such nice places as we did in Oklahoma and Texas. Instead, I returned to Midwest State and went back to where I grew up and returned to the district where I had previously worked as an assistant superintendent.

The assistant superintendent, John, who brought me up into my first district level job was getting ready to be the next superintendent in the district. He called and said, “Do you want to be deputy superintendent?” I said, “Oh, I don’t know that I really want to do that.” He countered, “Think about this for your career; this is going to be great. You have always focused on instruction and done the instruction side of the house.” He continued, “This will put you in the Human Resource (HR) Division—put you over legal, put you over business, put you over plant facilities.” He added, “I’ll help you. Like I said, it will be good for your career.” He sold me on the job.

Returning to my roots. *I went back to western Midwest State for two years. Really, the first year I was thinking, “How in the heck did this happen? How did I leave and then end up circling right back to the very same place?” I loved working for John, and we always had a great relationship. By the second year, I felt more comfortable with my job and really loved the HR work. But, the first year was tough. Then as opportunities go, I had the chance to return to*

a large school district in Oklahoma through the connections I made when I previously worked in the state four years earlier.

***My husband did not follow me.** A woman whom I had worked with in Oklahoma had now taken a job with the Oklahoma State Department of Education and was working extensively with the Prince School District's school improvement efforts. Because of my connection with her, I returned to Oklahoma as an area superintendent for Prince Public Schools. It was a really good job. I was responsible for one-third of the schools in that district, which comprised about 32 schools. The superintendent worked with the board, and I reported directly to him. As long as I was keeping him informed, we progressed forward. I thought my husband would follow me there eventually because his career field was in oil and gas. But as life goes, his company transferred him back to our hometown out west where I had just left.*

Anyway, we did that—we lived apart. We had a seven-year stint where we lived in different cities. Returning to Oklahoma was a great experience. I worked for a woman, Molly. She was really probably my first woman boss. But at the end of that year, the superintendent at Prince left. I could see the writing on the wall that the incoming superintendent was not going to take the district in the direction I felt it should go. So, life's course changed again. It was at this point where I made the critical mistake of my career.

***A career regret.** We have a cabin in Cotera, which is in Southern Colorado. On a whim, I took a superintendency job in a district in Southern Colorado with a student population of 1,500. Unfortunately, I really did not do my homework on this job. And I knew it by the first week of August. I started in July, and one month later I knew I had made a serious career mistake. I never felt that way on any of the other career moves I had made. This district had many personnel issues. For example, one of my directors who also drove a bus for us had*

previously gotten a DUI but never renewed his license. Well, that was an easy decision to make. Firing him was not hard at all. But other decisions were not so easy. The school board president's son was the chair of our English department. She was only on the board to protect him. It was a mess. Truly, it was a bad experience.

State department bound. *When I was in western Midwest State, I made a lot of connections with people who worked at the State Department of Education. Two of the main ones would be Terrence Able who was once the Commissioner of Education and one of his Directors, Kyle Drake. When Terrence was the Commissioner and I was an administrator, he tried to get me to move to the State Department of Education to be the assistant commissioner of instruction. My husband and I considered the proposal and discussed it. We decided if I wanted to take the job I could. We drove up and looked around the local area. We went up, looked at our options, and came home. I turned down the offer. Our children were still in high school, and I just did not feel like a new school would be a good move for them. Since I did not take the job, Terrence hired Paula Adams as the assistant commissioner of instruction. I got to know her, not real well, but I got to know her.*

So, while I was a superintendent in Colorado, I ran into Paula at a conference. She asked me, "Well how's it going? How are you liking Colorado?" I told her I had made a serious mistake, and my plan was to stay one more year then leave. She replied, "I have two jobs for you. If you'd like, you can be over Title I and school improvement for the state or you can be over teacher licensure for the state. Just come out. Check it out." I took the train from southern Colorado to eastern Midwest State, interviewed for the job, and chose the Title I and school improvement position. I learned a lot those three years at the state department, and I had

a lot of fun along the way. I was able to work on projects I had never before imagined. I traveled all over the state. I made a lot of contacts with a lot of superintendents.

Connections were key to my second superintendency. *When I was working as the school improvement coordinator for the State Department of Education, there were really five large districts my team and I worked extensively with in Midwest State. Centerville was one of those districts, and Sean King was the superintendent. Sean and I previously worked together out west. He left rather abruptly, but we always kept in touch and we would see each other at conferences. Sean was working with the Midwest State Learning Network (MSLN) who recommended a lot of changes be made at the Centerville district. He had to do a lot of house cleaning. I helped him behind the scenes by working with him at the state department to make sure what he wanted to have happen was being written into the report for MSLN. We always had a really good relationship. A lot of times when my team was out doing state education audits, I would stop in just to visit with him. We both knew a lot of the same people.*

In the end, Sean left Centerville abruptly, and the district hired an elderly superintendent from another district. He worked for one week or maybe two or three days—not very long, and said, “I can’t do this.” That was in July, so Sean urged some of the people who were working at Centerville that we both knew to call me and see if I would be interested in being their interim superintendent. He called Karen Chase, Centerville’s school attorney. I knew Karen from my days out west because she was an attorney for the state school boards association. We had become friends. When I was working in the area at the state department, we would get together for a drink every now and then. Sean encouraged Karen to call me and see if I would consider taking the interim superintendent job. I did consider it. I interviewed on a Friday morning. By the time I got back to my office at the state department, the district called and offered me the

position as Centerville's interim superintendent. I accepted. By October that same year, the school board officially gave me the title of superintendent. It really is about connections.

My husband followed. *It is funny how life hits you. I was 44 of 45 years old before I learned something about myself that I had not previously realized. You know, I grew up in western Midwest State and raised my children in the house in which I grew up. My parents died when I was 21, so my husband and I just moved into their home and raised our kids. My high school friends would tell you how surprised they were I ever left the area. What I discovered about myself when I got older is that I like change. I like new adventures. I like new cities. I like new activities. Who would have thought? For the first 40 some years of my life, everybody would have expected me to live and die in the western area of the state.*

When I came here, I didn't intend to stay very long in Centerville. But truly I have been here longer than other places. I am starting my third year with Centerville, and I was here three years before that when I worked at the State Department of Education. I have been in this area for six years. I have two sons who live here and our oldest son is expecting his first child in October. I will have my first grandchild. Our youngest is recently married and has a child who came with the marriage, and we are thrilled to have him.

A year and a half ago, my husband finally decided to retire from the gas company. He moved here, and I thought he would do consulting work because of his opportunities. But he just likes being retired. He putters. He goes to events with me. He cooks. He plays golf with the kids. He babysits. Life is funny. The longer we are here, the longer I think we may just stay here.

Future plans. *I have a great district leadership team. We are working on a great strategic plan. Life is pretty good right now. But things can change overnight. The school*

board will decide whether or not to renew my contract. It would not kill me if they didn't renew it because I have other opportunities. One opportunity has to do with connections again. When I was at the State Department, we started the Midwest State Learning Network. Through them, I made a really great connection with a consulting firm, and they contacted me this week to see if I would be interested in going to New York to work.

I introduced the firm's leadership to Gwen Morris up in New York. I would not mind doing an interim superintendency if this job does not pan out. Yet, Centerville needs stability. They need people to stay a while. Most of the previous superintendents were only here for two to three years, and it has been that way for 20 years. The district is so far behind the times just because they keep starting over every time someone new is hired.

From what I am hearing from some members of the school board—not all of them and especially not one in particular—is that they would love to see this leadership team stay in place. Not just me, but the entire team. They want the district to have stability. We have some of the right principals in place, too. I could easily make this my last stop. I have some things I personally have to deal with. I am 57, and I stayed home for seven years while my children were growing up. I need to think about my retirement. Plus, I have moved out of state; I have a little bit of retirement in Texas. It wouldn't hurt me to go to back to Oklahoma either. Prince's superintendency is going to be open in a year. If this does not work out, I might try one more superintendency.

On the other hand, we bought a home here. We have put down roots. Grandkids are going to be here. It would be to my advantage to stick around. I get tickled by being the first woman superintendent here. That has been pretty interesting, but it really is not about my way. I am very collaborative. I do have a vision of where we want to go and what we want to do, but I

know a lot of people shape it as we go along. It does not have to be all about me. And I do not have to be the one taking the credit; somebody else can be out there getting credit.

Apparently a lot of male superintendents before me ran the district like a dictator. I think some of the folks who work here are worried about my leaving. I think they wonder if a new superintendent would bring things back around to more of a dictatorship rather than the shared vision we have now.

Community Connections

Faye's connection to the community is a critical aspect of her job. Centerville is closely located to the State Capitol, so her position requires her to be well informed of the legislative process related to education.

Local community. *Truly, this is what I struggle with and I think a lot of women do. I was good at curriculum instruction, assessments, and principal supervision. That's one thing. But this job is a lot of schmoozing. I am on a lot of committees and a lot of boards. I am in Rotary, which has about 100 people attending every meeting. The average Rotarian age would be 75. And if I do not attend, they notice. When it comes to community organizations, it seems I see the same people again and again. In some ways I don't know if I know that many, but the same people who are involved in Rotary are involved in United Way, or are involved in Junior Achievement, or are involved in the Boy Scouts Council. I go and see the same people, which I think is sort of funny. Being involved in the community is important here. If I were not visible you'd hear about it from the organizations' boards.*

Legislative community. *The politics here are very interesting. I often testify at the State Capitol. A lot of times it is just because our district is in the region, and they call me because they need something. I have legislators calling me. From January to March, a big part of this*

job involves being engrossed in the legislative community. I bet I was up there ten times this past year. I have to write and read testimony. I sit around waiting a lot. This is the bad part of being a superintendent here; it was a little surprising. We employ a full-time lobbyist from January to March. This is so different from being in the western area of the state. Of course, you followed politics out west, but it was never anything like this.

Professional Networks

Faye's closest connection to a professional network is through the monthly superintendent meetings and the state superintendent's organization. However, she has limited her involvement with the organization, as her educational philosophy does not match theirs at times. Other than connecting with other women in the organizations, she has found it to be of little benefit.

Key friendships and connections. *There are certain people with whom I stay connected. Mike Pyle was a superintendent in Hayden and John worked for him and Tevin Singleton. All three of those people have been extremely helpful to my career. Gwen Morris is someone I keep in touch with; she was the gal who put me in touch with the job in Prince. I keep up with the superintendent in Oklahoma. It is about relationships.*

I did have a female colleague when I worked in Texas who was really great also; she was an amazing African American female. We were doing school reform in a very high-risk urban district. We had fun. We got to do so much. There were really three of us who were changing things. It was such a great opportunity.

I have John on my speed dial. I do not contact him as much as I used to, partly because he works in a different role now. Gwen Morris is now a deputy superintendent in Buffalo, New York, and I talk to her a couple of times a year. I could probably talk to John or Gwen about

anything. Gwen had been superintendent in an urban school district in Indiana before we worked together in Oklahoma. She was African American, and here I come from the Midwest. I have had some extensive experiences, but I had not really worked with African American populations. I think she was leery when she brought me in. She was sort of like, "Well, you've worked with Hispanic students, but will you be able to work with African American students?" You had to gain her trust probably more so than you would a man's trust. But once you got it, you had her. She was a good friend.

Women mentoring women. *Probably one of the nicest things that ever happened is when I was invited by a woman superintendent to attend a conference. She lived back here and we had met at a conference. There was a group of five women superintendents around 1996 who were each picking out another woman superintendent they would like to mentor. They invited us to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) Women's Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. We really had a great time. The invitation was such a nice gesture. I did not know those women very well, but we really had a great time. It was a positive experience. The education service center in the southwest part of the state used to host a conference on women in leadership. I think they still have a speaker who comes out. I always tried to attend those.*

Superintendent network. *I attend the Council of Superintendents meetings. I find it kind of loosey-goosey. I just have a different philosophy. I work for Centerville Public Schools and the board is my employer. I had better know that. Sometimes the goals of the superintendents on the council do not align with the goals of Centerville Public Schools. I go to the Council of Superintendents meetings and find there are a few superintendents who are trying to be real splashy and political. On a lot of issues we are testifying on the same side; however,*

on a lot of issues we are not. For instance, the superintendents have taken an anti-teacher position. That is not the position at all that my school board has taken.

So, I had to step back a little bit. In fact, I did not even attend their summer conference. It was sort of like—I don't know. [Whispers] It's a real good ol' boys' club in a lot ways. I do play golf, but it is kind of like.... I went to a summer conference once, and I liked the women who attended. There are a lot of women superintendents that I do like, but otherwise I just do not feel like I get that much out of the organization. Therefore, I am not terribly active in it. As far as being on the council, I think if you have been involved long enough you can run for a council position. I might get more involved just because of the women in that group.

The Midwest State School Superintendents Association (MSSSA) folks are the same people as on the Council of Superintendents. Jim is our large school representative this year and next year. I would guess I'd take the seat after him because it is rotated. I was given good advice about attending the council meetings, though. A fellow woman superintendent told me I should attend. She goes, "I usually just go ahead and attend because you get so much good information and you kind of get the first run on what the state department is trying to do." Being so close to where the meeting is held makes it easy for me to attend. The meetings are held from three o'clock to five o'clock. That makes it easy for me to go over and end my day down there.

But I also like it in some ways. I do get to see other superintendents from all over the state. An example is Tim Thompson, who is down the road a ways. He is the superintendent of a big school like ours, and we have made a pretty good connection. In fact, we are going to model some of our programs after what he is doing in his district. I made my first connection with him through the council. But I will say, you really do feel like you are in the minority there. For a lot of the small town superintendents, the council meetings are probably their only real

connection to others in the state. They probably do not get to attend national conferences. Here at Centerville, we're always going somewhere.

Unsettled Talk

Faye was very matter of fact when it came to expressing any barriers she had encountered as a woman superintendent. There were moments when she experienced resistance coming more from women than from men. While she ultimately does not know why there are not more women superintendents in the state, she does feel some women have reached their ultimate goal as a principal while others get stuck in curriculum jobs at the district level.

Resistance from women. *I'm going to be honest, even when you become superintendent, some of the women are not as friendly as you would think they would be. I try very hard if there is a new woman superintendent hired to go out of my way and talk to her because I did not feel like it was open arms for me. And I don't know why.*

This is pretty sad to say, but I have probably had more resistance from women in my career than from men. I have had subordinates look at me and say, "I've always liked to have a male supervisor." And I'm like, "Really? That makes a difference?" You will come across moments where some people just prefer men bosses, since mostly men are in supervisory positions. School boards are weird anyway, but I have had two interesting experiences because I worked with school boards in four different cities. I had two experiences where board members get bossy and in both cases the board member was a woman. Both instances were very similar. They brought me in a list of things I needed to do. I wondered if it had something to do with me being a woman. Would she give me a "to-do" list if I were a man? Would she bring in a list and say, "You really ought to do these things." I usually just decide if she and the other board members agree as a group for me to do these things, then I will do them.

My assistant superintendent is my worker bee. In a lot of ways when I look at her, I think that was what I was doing ten years ago for my superintendent—I made him look good. I got things done, which is kind of too bad women have to do that. You know what I mean? This is funny, and I've thought about this a lot. But have you ever just wished you were happy with a job? I am pretty happy with this job. I went into teaching the same time as a lot of other women. Yet, I moved up and ended up supervising them. In situations like that, you find out who your real friends are. But that's okay.

I know a woman who is probably the world's best principal. She is one of the best principals I have ever worked with, and she has been just happy in her elementary building. She's never wanted to move up. She has never wanted to move. She has not even moved across town. I think a lot of women plateau and think, "Well this is it. I have reached the top. I have become a principal, and I can just stop." I have another friend who went into education the same time I did and is now a principal. She could have done some other things, but now it is kind of late in her career to be thinking about making a move up. I think that happens with women. Or I find that if women do move up, they go into curriculum and get stuck there.

I think your window of opportunity is a little shorter as a woman. It is almost like you cannot move up too quickly if you are young and a woman. I felt that way for a while too. It was like I did not have enough experience; yet, at some point you're getting older.

Katherine

My plan was to do HR for one year and then get a superintendent job. But I always said I would not apply just anywhere. I love western Midwest State. I get paid well. If the right job comes along, I will leave. If the right job does not come along, I am not going

anywhere. I could have stayed until I retired. Apparently, they would have hired me as the interim. I told my boss that I was not leaving Hayden just to go be an interim. If they want to hire me, they can hire me a year from now. And they did.

Introduction

Katherine is a Caucasian woman in her mid-40s. For the last two years, she has been the superintendent of a large school district in the central region of the state. This is her first superintendency. Katherine has been in public education for 25 years. Prior to her superintendency, she was a teacher for 10 years, assistant principal for 5 years, assistant superintendent for 6 years, and central office coordinator for 2 years.

Katherine grew up on a farm in the southeast region of the state in an unincorporated township. She met her first husband and started her teaching career in the area. However, divorce led her to pursue better opportunities.

Path to the Superintendency

Katherine was a woman with a plan. Each position she took in her career was with great consideration knowing it would provide her the experience needed to move on to positions of greater responsibility ultimately culminating in a superintendency.

Teacher. *I grew up doing farm work. I always said I would never have much to do with the farm after I had the opportunity to escape, although that changed a bit. I got married right out of high school to a man who farmed for a little while with my father. But that did not end up working out well. My father is a hard person to work for. He is kind of a perfectionist. However, I did work for him while attending community college. I went to get my bachelor's degree at a nearby state regent university. After graduation, I was offered a job in Kimball, a neighboring school district to where I grew up. I started my teaching career there and stayed for*

ten years. I taught debate, drama, forensics, and English. I was not certified to teach drama, forensics, or debate. But, you know how it is in a small school. They say, "Hey, we see on your resume that you did that stuff in high school. Will you do this?" I said, "Yes." And that was that. I really enjoyed teaching. After teaching for five years, I had an opportunity to let go of teaching drama classes. I wanted to reduce the number of preps I had in order to focus on getting a master's degree. I did not think I could teach debate, drama, forensics, and obtain my graduate degree all at the same time. In my spare time, I also did all of the financial management, payroll, and bookkeeping for the trucking company my ex-husband and I owned at the time. I had a lot on my plate. When my principal agreed to let me give up teaching drama classes, I went back to college to pursue my graduate degree in educational leadership.

Principalship and gender bias. I had a really good principal who mentored me. He gave me a lot of good experiences that I don't think most students got. The students in my graduate class were told we would have to do an internship. For the majority of them, it meant student supervision duty, bus duty, and evening activity supervision. But my principal came up with a list of quality activities for me that was a mile long. I did everything from riding a bus route to helping build the master schedule. I would even sit in on parent meetings in order to learn how to handle discipline issues. My internship was very thorough. But I knew these were the issues I was going to have to deal with when I became a principal, so I found it to be a very rewarding experience. I graduated with my master's degree in 1997 and got divorced in 1998. Getting divorced was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Strangely enough, the year prior to my divorce, there was an assistant principal opening in Kimball. I applied for the job. I was actually recommended for the job by both the principal and superintendent. However, the board of education did not offer me the job. It is amazing the

bias you expect is happening at the time but then actually gets confirmed later. After time had passed, I did hear that the school board asked, "Didn't we have any guys apply?" The position was advertised, and I applied. I was internally supported and recommended by the administrative team in the district. I do not remember if they interviewed two or three people; it has been too long ago. I went through an interview process. And like I said, the superintendent recommended the board hire me. But, they did not offer me the job. As I recall, one of the board members was absent. It was a 3-3 vote. I did not have the four votes needed, and that was the end of that. They offered the job to a male who, interestingly enough, was let go two years later.

Opportunities abound. *I stayed in Kimball one more year. The following year, I found myself in the midst of a rather ugly divorce and said, "Well, if I'm going to be single, I'm going to be single on an administrator's salary. I will go wherever I must in order to put this degree to use." I figured I would struggle to find my first administrator's job for a couple of reasons. First, my certificate was only for administration in grades seven through twelve. A lot of the middle schools were comprised of grades six through eight. I assumed my certificate would not cover middle school. My second issue was I did not have experience with athletics. I thought if I were going to be an assistant principal then I would also have to be an activities director. I was concerned I would not get hired since I had no experience in doing athletic work. My best hope was probably a small school where they were looking for a principal and hopefully had someone else to do the athletic job part-time.*

I was not for sure what the right combination would be. I just knew I would do whatever I had to and go wherever I needed to in order to get my first administrative job. That was my plan. I applied for every administrative position open. It just so happened that very early in the year, there was an opening in out west in Hayden for an assistant principal. I applied for the job

around Thanksgiving. By spring break, I was offered the position as assistant principal in charge of discipline at Hayden High School.

There were many openings that year, and I applied for a lot of jobs. I had applied for a job in some other little district and went through an interview process with them. I also applied in Monroe, a large suburban school district. Hayden called and offered me the job while I was still prepping for my interview in Monroe. It was just bang, bang, bang interviews. I made it through the first round of interviews in Monroe. However, after I got the offer from Hayden, I called them back and told them I was discontinuing the process as I had been offered a job elsewhere. I believe that same day I also got the call from another school district who was offering me a job, but I informed them I already had a contract.

Assistant principal of discipline. I went from teaching language arts in a school of about 230 kids with zero diversity to being in charge of discipline in the fourth largest high school in the state with a lot of diversity. At that time, the district's student population was about 30 percent non-English speaking and about 60 percent minority. I still, to this day, do not know why they hired me. Although, I am thoroughly convinced it is because I cussed in the interview. It is kind of a funny story. The cussing wasn't bad. But I remember they asked this question about—you know—being a team player; they wanted somebody who would speak her own mind. That was the gist of the question. And I remember saying, "You know, I will tell you what I think. If we're having a discussion, I'm going tell you what I think. But if what we decide on something other than what I think, that's fine. I will go out there and bust my butt to implement whatever we decided in here. And that's the way it is." At the moment the words "bust my butt" come pouring out of my mouth, I start thinking there is no way they are going to hire me for this job. I just said something a little off the cuff for a job interview. Looking back now and knowing the

people the way I do, I believe they wanted to know I was going to be able to handle the job. Their concern whenever we would sit around and conduct interviews—especially if we were looking to add another female to our team—was always wondering if the next principal would be eaten alive. So, I am thoroughly convinced my bold statement made a difference in my being chosen for the job.

Doctorate bound. *I was the only female assistant principal when I first started at Hayden. Being an assistant principal was the training ground to future administrative duties. Often assistant principals would get promoted to a principal's job within the district. I was the assistant principal of discipline for five years. The summer after I completed my first year, I began working on my doctorate. Six months into my job at Hayden, the superintendent came to me and said, "We like our administrators to have their doctorates. You have a lot of potential. You really need to think about getting yours." My first thought was, "We're clear out here. Where am I supposed to get a doctorate?" But he gave me the names of several administrators who were already attending the state university. He said, "You should visit with them. You need to go do this. And we'll make it happen. We'll give you flex time in your contract. You really need to think about doing this. All right?" My principal also encouraged me. I always wanted to go to college at state. I was pretty excited.*

Hayden had a very nice salary schedule. Each year you were given a raise for movement across the salary schedule. Educational attainment also provided movement on the salary schedule. I think I was poised to receive a \$4,000.00 pay raise when I earned my doctorate degree. I thought, "Well, I'd like to be a superintendent someday." I always felt that since I was a female I needed the doctor in front of my name to accomplish what I wanted to. I just thought the credentials would give me a leg up in the good ol' boy world. I considered their proposal

and figured it would pay for itself over six years. So I went for it. Hayden school district was very supportive. Even though the district did not pay my tuition, the salary schedule was structured to compensate for that. As it worked out, I graduated in 2004 and was immediately promoted to a central office position. It worked out well.

Assistant superintendent. *I guess I should backup a little bit. Getting promoted to central office comes with an interesting story. In the spring of 2004, the high school principal position became vacant. I applied for the position of principal at Hayden High School and became one of the finalists. While I was in the interview process, one of the directors of instruction at central office came to me and said, “Katherine, they’re trying to do something at the district level. I can’t really tell you what it is. But man, there might be an opening. I just think you’d be perfect for it. I just don’t know if all the pieces are going to come together.” I said, “That’s great, nice to know. But, I’ve applied for the high school principal’s job.” In the middle of scheduling interviews for the principal job, the district announced the vacancy for the director of supplemental programs. The woman who previously told me things were shaking up in the central office was the director of curriculum and instruction. However, her husband was being transferred out of state for his job, and she was moving with him and had already accepted a new job. Suddenly, two central office positions were now open. People were continuing to encourage me to apply for a position at the central office, so I applied for those in addition to the principal job. Now, I had two irons in the fire. The district search personnel were literally doing interviews simultaneously.*

The superintendent, John, also encouraged me to apply. He is a great guy. He has a knack for getting the right person in the right seat on the right bus and teaching you how to do the same. So John calls me in and says, “Katherine, I have a decision to make. You’ve

interviewed for the high school principal and for a central office position. I'm not going to tell you that you get to pick what you want to do. I have no doubt that you can run Hayden High School and run it very well. I also know I can find others to run Hayden High School. However, I am not sure I can find somebody else to do the central office job." He goes, "I honestly do not know if just anybody can do the job I have created because I have taken two very full job responsibilities and merged them into one. I haven't taken anything off the plate. But I believe that if one person can do it, that person is you. So, I need to know where your interests lie." I was torn. I loved Hayden High School, and I felt like it needed me. Plus, I felt like I was letting down a lot of people if I did not become their next principal. Money was also an issue for me. While I would make more money as the principal, it was not a lot more. It was probably \$8,000.00 or \$9,000.00 more a year. It was significant, especially as a single female. But the central office job was going to be a big raise, too. And central office was ultimately where I wanted to be.

I talked with John about some of the issues worrying me. I said, "John, the one thing that worries me is I want to be a superintendent some day. Will I one day be applying for a superintendent job and not get it because people will see that I was never a principal? Therefore, will they think I lack the leadership experience needed to be a superintendent? Will they think I haven't proven myself to do the tough stuff?" He says, "All I can tell you is sometimes you come to a fork in the road, and you have to make a decision. And once you do, you never look back." But what tipped the scale for me was my fiancé. He was a principal in another district. As the principal, I would have had to supervise all these night activities at the same time he was. I knew I was never going to see him if I did that. So, I gambled with the future and chose the route of the central office position. I completely skipped the principal's chair. I always worried that it

would come back to haunt me. But, I think I gained plenty of experience at the central office level. It was not long before I took on many responsibilities that would round out my experiences.

Soon after, John retired and a new superintendent, Adam, was hired. He was another wonderful leader. As he was coming in, other key staff was moving on. Adam was left with making the tough decision of promoting Sheldon or me to deputy superintendent. I could tell Adam was thinking, "Oh, my God, I have to pick one of these two people. I don't know who to bestow this title upon plus all the work that comes with it." He came to the two of us and told us to think about what we wanted. I will never forget the look of relief on his face when he came in asking us for our proposal, and I said, "I've given this a lot of thought. The job that I have is a very big job. I know the things I do are responsibilities that come with the title of being an assistant superintendent." At the time we were called directors not assistant superintendents. So I said, "I can't figure out how to give any of my job away and do justice to being the deputy superintendent. I'd really like for you to consider giving me the assistant superintendent title. I'm not asking for any more money. But could I have the title, please? I will be proud to serve under Sheldon. And he will be a fine deputy superintendent for you. I believe that's what you need to do." I remember him saying, "Really, are you serious? Done." Besides the title, he also gave me a raise to go with it. That was how that worked out. I still remember him just being so relieved. He's like, "Really, you're fine with this?" I just said, "Yes, I'm completely fine with it. This is what you need to do. This will benefit the district the most because I won't do it justice if I try to spread this work out. So, this is what needs to happen." And that is exactly what we did. He then added, "All of you want to be superintendents some day. If there is anything you guys want to do to learn from each other like job shadow, or trade portions of

your job, or change your job descriptions, or switch jobs—I am fully supportive.” I took him up on the offer about a year and a half later. The human resource (HR) director and I switched jobs. Except, I took my title and my salary with me.

Assistant superintendent of HR. *My plan was to do HR for one year and then get a superintendent job. But the economy took a turn for the worst, and the money started going downhill. I realized it probably was not the time to step out and look for a new job. But after two years in the HR position, I applied for a superintendency. I cannot remember what came up. I think Monroe had an opening. I applied but did not even get an interview. I always said I would not apply just anywhere. I loved Hayden. I was paid well. If the right job came along, I would leave. If the right job did not come along, I was staying put. I could have stayed at Hayden until I retired.*

Superintendent. *Actually, I applied for this job I’m in now the first year it was advertised. Adam—my boss—applied for it at the same time. I knew he was applying. I told him, “I know you’re going to apply for Easton. But, I’m going to apply, too. I’m aware I probably won’t get an interview because they’ve practically recruited you. It is obvious they want you to apply. But this is what I intend to do if it’s okay with you.” I said, “I’m going to apply. I’m going to call Harold Miller.” He was the lead consultant on the search committee for the consulting firm that was hired to fill the vacancy. I just picked up the phone and called him. That was Adam’s advice to me the previous year; he was a great mentor. He advised me to call the people who are in charge of the vacancy search and talk to them.*

I called Harold and told him I planned to apply for the Easton job, but I knew my boss was applying as well. I told him if he had the chance to hire Adam, he should. I was applying because I wanted him to see my application materials. I said, “I realize I’m not going to be your

number one choice for this job. I know Adam is applying. I also know there's someone else applying who would be really great for the job," which was John, my previous superintendent. I said, "I know he's going to apply also. But, I want you to look at my materials. A year from now, I'm going to be serious about getting a superintendent job. I am hoping your review of my credentials now will help you help me find a job next year. By giving you my credentials ahead of time, you'll begin to get to know who I am even if it's just on paper." He replied, "Oh, all right. Great."

Harold was a very pleasant chap to talk with. I found out later they actually wanted to interview me, but they thought it would have been strange with Adam also in the mix. They offered the job to Adam, but he declined it. He said the district was not a good fit for him and his family. Afterwards, Adam came to me and said, "Next year, when that job is open, you need to apply for it. There isn't anything wrong with that district. We just decided we wanted to stay in Hayden." When Adam turned down the job, the district decided to fill it with an interim superintendent instead of starting the search process all over again.

Adam did tell me after he declined the job that if I wanted the Easton interim job, all I needed to do was call Harold and tell him I would take it. Evidently, they would have hired me as the interim if I had told them I was interested. But, I told Adam, "I am not leaving Hayden just to go be an interim some place. If they want to hire me, they can hire me a year from now." And that is exactly what they did.

I called Harold in October the next school year and said, "Hi, Harold, you remember me?" By that point, he had time to review my credentials. He was really nice to me. "Oh, yes," he said, "What can I do for you?" I replied, "Well, I told you I would be seriously looking for a job—a superintendency—this year. I was hoping I could talk to you now, before anything

officially becomes vacant. What can you tell me? What do I need to do to get my name out there? What do I need to do to be a contender? Is there any advice you could give me right now when nothing is currently posted?” He was extremely helpful. He goes, “Yes, you need to come to one of our fall workshops.” He added, “I want to meet you. And I want to introduce you to the rest of the guys who do the searches. You need to get to know these people.” I did know some of the people because I attended KASB trainings for my job. But I did not know any of the people who really were the headhunters—the ones who did the actual searches.

I went there and met them. When I got there, I found he had taken my credentials and shown them to the guys who did the superintendent searches. As I introduced myself to them, they said, “Oh, yes, we’ve seen your stuff.” They had very positive comments. It really made me feel good. I networked and got to know all the guys who did the searches. Since Easton had an interim, it was one of the very first searches they conducted that year. I applied and got the job. They interviewed three of us—one was a guy and another was a gal.

Family. *Life just happened to work out that I did not have any children with my first husband. When I was 30, I was getting divorced. The age of 30 is when I should have been having kids if I wanted them. By then, I started dating my eventual husband. I knew if we ever got married we would not have children because he did not want any. My husband is quite a bit older than I am.*

He has a grown son. He always told me he never wanted to get married and have more children. I was 34 or 35 years old at the time. It was the time for me to decide if I wanted children or not. I do not think I could do the job I have now very well and be a good mom. Maybe I was not cut out to be a mom. Maybe I am not supposed to be a mom. I have kind of always been okay with that. I was the kid in high school who said I was never going to have

children. I did not want to change dirty diapers. I still do not like changing dirty diapers. We have a step granddaughter and new little grandson who is three months old. I have concluded this is a pretty good arrangement. But I suppose I made a conscious choice at one point. It was stay in this relationship knowing I was choosing a career and no kids. Or I could choose to find a different boyfriend and go the family route. I chose the husband I have. I did not need children. My career is pretty good. I guess it was a conscious decision.

***My career can come first.** My husband retired from education in 2007. He proposed in 2005 and said, "Will you marry me? We can get married whenever you want. But I'm not moving until I can retire in 2007." I responded, "Well, I don't like the idea of being married and living apart. So, we'll get married when you retire." We were married in April 2007, and he retired in June 2007. He moved to Hayden with me. At that point, it was about my career. My goal was to retire as a superintendent. He told me he would follow me around for the rest of his life. After his retirement, he stated, "Your career will come first. I can do whatever."*

***An eye toward retirement.** Eight more years and I will retire and go into educational consulting. I will just hop around and work here and there. I network with people who are doing the kind of consulting work I want to do when I retire. I ask how they got hooked up in their current job? How did they get to where they are today? How did they start their own consulting agency? I am always asking questions and taking little mental notes so I am ready for what I want to do when I grow up.*

Community Connections

Katherine was not very involved in the community of Hayden until she set upon her goal of being a superintendent. However, once becoming a superintendent, she became immersed in local community organizations.

Not well connected. *I did not network a whole lot in the community until probably the last two years I was at Hayden. I began to make a plan. I told myself I would one day be a superintendent, and wondered what school boards would want to see on my resume? I realized my community involvement needed to be more robust. So, I joined Kiwanis, landed myself on the Board of Directors for United Way, and started to get more involved in the church. My social circles really expanded. I did it for the sole purpose of making my resume look better.*

Well connected. *I belong to Rotary. I am on the Boys and Girls Club Board of Directors. I am also on the United Way Board of Directors. The Boys and Girls Club invited me; they like having the local superintendent join their organization. United Way was calling me because they saw I had been a part of United Way in Hayden. Before I was even moved here, they were calling to know if I would be on their board as soon as they had an opening. I told them I needed to get my feet on the ground the first year, but if they had an opening the following year to call me. From a political standpoint, United Way is the best organization in which to be a board member. Because they fund so many of our affiliate organizations, I now have connections to people in numerous other organizations. I volunteer for Big Brothers and Big Sisters. They wanted me to be on their Board, but I declined. The Housing Commission is another board I am on for the city. When you are more visible in the community, it is easier for the community to support you. One thing I have heard here—knock on wood—is the community seems to love me. It will be interesting to see if I can sustain that for years and years and years.*

Professional Networks

Katherine has taken full advantage of traveling throughout the state and getting to know key individuals. She is keenly aware of which organizations provide the best networking

opportunities. While others women superintendents appear to be more involved with MSSSA, Katherine has planted her social capital seeds in the state school boards association network.

A peer network. *When I was a principal, I belonged to Midwest State Association of Secondary School Principals (MSASSP) and regularly attended their regional meetings. Other than that, I did not do a whole lot to get out and network. I would chat with the principals in the neighboring city a little. When I moved to central office, it seemed like my network really expanded. Suddenly, I was connecting with people at the state department; I was getting to know them, be involved with them, and network with them. I attended the quarterly curriculum directors meeting hosted by the state department of education. That was probably my greatest networking avenue. I did not belong to United School Administrators (USA) because Hayden did not push USA. The state department of education was my primary source of networking. I got involved in a lot of committee work. I was on the Assessment Advisory Council for the state. I did a lot of networking with people on that committee. The state department was really my primary means of making contact with other people in the state, whether they were superintendents or other curriculum directors. I did not go out much. My network was mostly made up of my administrative peers. When I was a principal, my network was the high school principal team; we were pretty close. As some people got promoted to principals in other buildings, we would continue to stay close and connected. That was pretty much my network. And when I moved to central office, it was central office people who made up the network we had. But I did not branch out much in the community otherwise.*

Superintendents' club. *When I became a superintendent, I joined the national and state superintendents organizations—United School Administrators (USA) and Midwest State School Superintendents Association. Yep, the superintendents' club. I belong to it. I also joined*

National Education Association (NEA) teacher's union. It makes my union people happy. Call it \$600 of good will. They invited me to join, so I did. Like I said, money spent toward good will. Plus when they send emails out to members, I get a copy. It is almost worth it. Strangely enough, I belong to the retired school personnel association for this area. My husband is a retired educator, so we joined as a couple. Their members just think it is great a superintendent belongs.

My network connects others. *Search committees are good. That is not something I had thought of before, but now I see the state school boards association as a great place to network if you aspire to be a superintendent. Obviously, I should have been going to their annual meetings all along. You will want to attend their meetings. That is where you will meet possible future board members. When I present at the school boards association workshops, board members from other school districts are there seeing what you are presenting. You actually get to meet board members from other districts. When people I have mentored start looking for jobs and applying elsewhere, I have connections around the state where I can put in a good word for them. Often, I will call the consultants doing superintendent vacancy searches. I recently called Hank Jefferies and said, "Hank, my assistant superintendent is going to be applying. She would be a good fit." I have called key personnel who used to work for me when I was in Hayden. I can call upon them when I think there is someone they should consider as a strong candidate.*

Support network. *Depending on what I need determines whom I call. Sometimes internal issues pop up very quickly, and luckily I have a wonderful team. I learned very quickly whom I could trust on my staff. We talk, and I ask their advice. Sometimes, I will call the folks back in Hayden and get their opinion on matters. I have called other superintendents in large districts and just said, "Hey, I heard you do a good job with such and such. Would you share?" I have called Faye in Centerville because she and I are friends. The folks at the school boards*

association are good resources. The folks at the state department of education are a good resource also; although I am sure sometimes they hate me. If I call a person there and do not get the answer I want, I will just call the next person in the hierarchy.

Mentorship. *I think you tend to seek out other females who have been successful and are doing well. I try to find out what they know. I do find myself tending to gravitate toward several of the males who have been very influential in my career and have mentored me. I think you tend to gravitate to them. These people support me. I do not think it is because I am female, but rather people see the talent I have and are going to be a resource for helping me. You try to surround yourself with those kinds of people. And then you try to do the same thing in return. Like I said, I am trying to help my assistant superintendent. But not just her, I have several male principals in which I see leadership ability also. I am trying to encourage them to pursue their specialist or doctoral degrees. I try to encourage leadership in my team, wherever I see talent, whether the person is a female or male because I really appreciate the people who mentored me. I want to pass that on. It seems like maybe females try to do that a little more than some of their male counterparts. I do not know if that is due to nurturing or gratitude or what it is.*

Unsettled Talk

Talking about issues of discrimination and inequality were matter of fact with Katherine. If it existed in certain pockets of her career, she simply steered clear. A victim she is not.

Good-ol'-boy network. *There is always a little fear regarding the existence of the good-ol'-boy network. You wonder if you are going to get a fair shot. I would not say I necessarily fear its existence. As I said, when I was in Kimball, I did encounter it once. There is the awareness the good-ol'-boy network is out there.*

I do feel a sense of exclusion with a few male superintendents. It tends to be with the older ones. But I do not mean to categorize them. There are some who you feel look at you and think you are the hired token female. I just ignore them. I do not particularly need to hang with them nor be around them. I tend to gravitate toward people who are helpful, supportive, and have ideas I want to know more about. Even if I think there are people who have no desire to help me, I will still approach them. I will still seek them out if they can offer me something I want to know more about. I am not bashful.

The woman's advantage. *I cannot say I have really experienced discrimination as a female superintendent. It has been good. I think sometimes being a woman is an advantage. I figure some angry guy will not come in and scream at you like they would a male superintendent because you cannot yell at women. Yeah, every once in a while, there may be just a little bit of advantage to being a woman superintendent. I cannot think of anything that has happened that I could categorize as a disadvantage. There is one crazy, ex-board member in the community I was warned about by the outgoing interim superintendent. Evidently, the ex-board member really likes to bully and intimidate the weak, particularly women. He would come in here and just badger the last two female superintendents. He came in once since I have been here. I was loaded for bear and apparently got my bluff in on him. He has not been back, points for me.*

Lack of women. *I do notice there are not many of us. But it is improving. I think it will continue to improve. I remember when I was starting on my master's degree to be a high school principal. There were hardly any female high school principals then. And there were hardly any female superintendents. I remember wondering if I was just kidding myself to even think of going in this direction. I was aware there were not a lot of females at the secondary level.*

Gwyneth

I have never felt excluded here in this district. Never. I am assuming it is because I have been here for 21 years. I'm assuming that is probably why. Everybody knows my work and what I've done. Since I have worked in this district, there have been nine superintendents. I am the first female superintendent for the district ever. I have never experienced any pushback from anyone, even as the first woman superintendent.

Introduction

Gwyneth is the superintendent of a small, rural school district consisting of approximately 100 students in the northwest area of the state. She is beginning her twenty-first year in education with this being her first superintendency. Previously, she spent 13 years as a classroom teacher and 7 years as a combined elementary/junior high principal. All of her 21 years in education have been in the same district.

Gwyneth is a forty-five year old Caucasian woman. She has spent the vast majority of her life in the northwest area of the state. She met her husband while in college, and they have four children.

Path to the Superintendency

Gwyneth has remained in the same district her entire career and moved from teacher to building administrator to superintendent. When we visited, she was in the first year of her superintendency. Reluctantly, she took on the added responsibility of district leader while also holding onto the job she loved as PreK-8 principal.

A rough beginning. *My parents bounced around a lot during my primary school years. We ended up settling down about 20 miles west of here when I was in 4th grade. My younger sister and I graduated from high school there. I had a rough childhood. I got pregnant very*

young and had a child at age 16. I was not expected to go to college or, you know, do much. I had a child when I was a high school junior. However, despite the odds, I graduated on track as a senior. I have always had a very strong work ethic. After graduation, I moved to Denver for about six months and worked in a daycare. For a while, I thought that was what I wanted to do. I discovered I did not want to be away from home, so on my own I moved back home to the northwest area. I did not go to college right out of high school because I needed to work. I worked two 40-hour-a-week jobs while raising my son and trying to get life figured out. I saved a lot of money so I could attend college.

I started at a regional public university, but my money was gone in one semester. I thought, “Now, what do I do?” Luckily, there are loans; it was pretty rough. I never had anything handed to me. I have always worked hard for everything I've received in life, which probably has helped me to get where I am today. Eventually, I went to college, graduated, got married along the way while I was in college, and started having more children—four now. I had three children by the time I finished four years of college. My husband and I have always lived in this area.

From part-time teacher to elementary principal. *I was hired at the junior high building in this district as a part-time language arts teacher, and I coached volleyball and basketball. I started out part-time as a teacher and was excited just to be in the education field doing what I always knew I wanted to do. I did that for a couple of years part-time, and then they added math and computer classes to my position. When that happened, they employed me full-time. I took over the school improvement coordinator position after I had been in the district three years and started working on my master's degree at the same time. I began teaching in 1992 and started graduate school in 1995. I originally chose a reading specialist major.*

However, I changed my degree when the superintendent came to me one afternoon and said, "You need to be in administration." I looked into the program, quickly changed plans, and started working toward my educational administrative degree. I graduated in 1999. I looked around at a few possible principal jobs in the area, and I even had an offer. But I just knew it was not the right time for me. It wasn't what I wanted.

I stayed teaching in the same district for thirteen more years before another opportunity came along. In 2004, our superintendent fell ill and decided to retire. The school board hired an interim superintendent to finish the year. In the meantime, the principal of the elementary school where I taught was working on his district-level administrative certificate and was being considered as our next superintendent. The following spring, my principal came to me and said, "Are you interested in moving to the PreK-8 principal position?" Of course I was. I knew that was what I wanted to do and was now ready to make the move out of the classroom.

Declined the superintendent offer. *In 2005, I became the PreK-8 principal. My boss moved up to the superintendent/high school principal position and remained there for four years. By the time he was ready to transition out as the superintendent, I had undertaken the task of obtaining my district leadership license. When he decided he was going to move on and take another job, the school board approached me about moving into the superintendent seat. I told them I was not interested. I just really enjoyed my job as the elementary principal. I told them, "Thank you. I appreciate your confidence in me, but we should search for another replacement." So we did that, and I was the one who ran the entire search process. I organized everything. I screened all of the applications and took them to the school board. As a team, the board and I conducted the interviews. I established a teacher committee to assist us through the process. We did the search the right way, and as a team we hired a superintendent.*

Accepted the superintendent offer. *He stayed on with us for three years. Early last spring, he resigned to take another position. The school board approached me again about taking the job, but I had some reservations because I simply loved being a PreK-8 building principal. I also knew our district was facing some challenges. I was concerned if we hired someone from the outside it would be someone who was brand new to the superintendent role. In a small school district, a new superintendent would most likely be a brand new superintendent. I realized I would have more experience due to the many roles I had taken on in my 20 years here. I decided I needed to do the job. So, I accepted the school board's offer last February. However, the stipulation was I would be the superintendent so long as I could remain the K-5 principal. I did not want a 6-12 principal/superintendent combination.*

Community Connections

Gwyneth knows the importance of being well connected in her community. She builds relationships not only with the individuals she hires but also with the local banker and property owners. She views building relationships in her communities as a necessary requirement of her position in the district.

Building relationships. *In general, it is important to build relationships as the superintendent—building relationships with your board members, building relationships with the people you work with every day. My situation is a little bit different because I have very personal relationships at every level in this district. I have it with my cooks, with my custodians, and with my secretaries. I think part of my connection at all levels is due to being in a smaller district, and part of it is because of my having a dual responsibility as building principal and superintendent. When it comes to the larger community, it is important to build relationships with your city council, as well as key players in your community and local businesses. But it*

goes even further in a small community because you also have to build relationships with your parents. We are unique because we are made up of three communities. Our district consolidated in the 1960s. It still affects people. You have to be aware of people's feelings on the issue. I do what I can to foster positive relationships in the community.

I meet with key community people, and we talk about what we can do to bring more people into our communities and to ensure we have adequate housing available.

Communication in a small district is difficult when it comes to getting the word out. I'm not talking about the day-to-day gossip, because that seems to run rampant. I am talking about communicating with the banker and the people who own rental property in each town. I have to build those relationships so I know when there are houses available. Especially when I get a phone call from a family who says, "We're looking to move to your community, what kind of housing do you have?" I drive people around; I drive families around. I show houses, and I have felt like a realtor. I wear all those hats, but it is all for the benefit of our district in order to try to increase our population. Being involved and connected is important.

Why relationships matter. *Because of our smaller numbers, we are looking at a cooperative for sports with a neighboring district that also has declining enrollment. Basically, we need one another in order to be able to field ball teams. We did it this past year for our junior high football, and the cooperative went well. It is obvious that if the need is there at the junior high level, it is eventually going to be needed in the high school. But it is not quite as simple as you would think it should be. We are having a parent meeting tonight, as I feel it is important to involve our communities in these discussions. The school is the heart of the town—of the communities—so we need to keep people informed. The district we are looking at having the cooperative with had their parent meeting last night; they had over 150 people show up. My*

goal tonight is to get our patrons to see this is a proactive approach, which is better than just sitting here and letting things happen to us. Instead, we are confronting the issues and seeking solutions.

Hometown hero. *I was the Midwest State Elementary Principal of the Year in 2009. It came as a complete surprise. When I received the award, I wasn't even aware I had been nominated. The presentation was at the Midwest State Elementary Principal Fall Conference. I did not tell anyone in my district about the award. I thought, I'll just go get my award and maybe eventually I will casually mention it to others. I only told my four children and my husband. He and I went to the banquet, and it was wonderful. I felt great about it. But I came home and went right back to work. It is just not my personality to say, "Hey, look at me." Therefore, I kept it a secret.*

Every Friday, we have an assembly called Celebration Friday. The goal of the assembly is to bring in a variety of positive role models for the students. After I returned from the banquet, my plaque was secretly and safely tucked in my book bag. As I entered school Friday morning, I realized I did not recall who was presenting at the assembly. I happened to make a comment to my secretary that I couldn't believe Mrs. So-and-So didn't bother to tell me who she was inviting. My secretary replied, "Oh, just go with it." So I did. No big deal. I figured I was gone, and they had everything taken care of.

The assembly was to highlight heroes. This will probably still give me a lump in my throat just talking about it because it is probably one of the highlights in my teaching career. It kind of puts everything into perspective; one of those monumental moments I will never forget. The presentation had different guest speakers who were all talking about their roles in the community, such as a fireman and people along that line. And then they said, "Well, we have

one hero...." I told you, I get choked up. Anyway, pictures of me come up on the screen. I'm just looking and thinking, "What? What are you guys doing?" I'm wondering why they are doing it. There were probably 15 or more community members present along with all of the elementary students. At this point, it still does not dawn on me that they know about my award. Just as my name is flashing on the screen, I look over to the side of our gymnasium and here come all of my junior high students—who, by the way, are supposed to be in school five miles away. I'm thinking, "What are you guys up to?" And then my family all came in—my mom, my aunt, and all of my children. I felt like Miss America; there were flowers and the whole thing. Then someone said, "You know, Mrs. Pifer doesn't always tell us everything." Anyway, they had gone and found my plaque that was hiding in my book bag. I am still not sure how the word got out. It was a big celebration. That was a big moment for me.

Professional Networks

For a first year superintendent, Gwyneth appears to have a strong professional network. Much of the groundwork for making connections was established in her previous role as junior high school principal and athletic director.

Formal mentoring program. *I have a support network, definitely. As a first-year superintendent, there is a new mentoring program called the Midwest State Educational Leadership Program (MSELP). They assigned me a mentor, and she is actually the retired superintendent from the district about 20 miles east of us. She has four of us who are brand new superintendents this year, including the lady who took her position. She has been a tremendous help. In addition to meeting with her, MSELP schedules meetings as a large group. I think there are 20 new superintendents in the state this year. But we also have monthly meetings with our mentor, and then we sometimes get together as a small group since she is mentoring four of us.*

MSELP will send out monthly checklists informing me of timely issues I should consider each month, as well as points I may want to address to my school board. It is a very organized and formal networking system. I would say that it is more important to have a mentorship program for new superintendents more so than just because a new superintendent is a female.

Local, peer networks. *Mentorship is one form of networking. Then there are the contacts I have made over the years. I have been the athletic director for the junior high for eight years and have been involved in many organization's activities in the area. So, I know quite a few administrators, especially if they hold a dual position as superintendent and principal. I have been able to call them when I need them. But the one I call the most is the superintendent who was here a few years ago. He is now a superintendent in another state. I rely on him a lot. He is very knowledgeable and understands the dynamics of our district. He was here two years as a principal and four years as a superintendent; so, he is the one I call. And really, it just depends on what I need as far as who I call.*

In our special education cooperative, there are 11 schools, and the superintendents meet monthly. This is a great networking system. There are only two females—the new superintendent in Johnstown and me. I was the only female athletic director in our area. I go to a lot of meetings where I may be the only female there. In fact, I host a lot of meetings where I am the only female there.

Some of the area superintendents do not go to anything. Then there are other superintendents who go to everything and get involved in everything. One of my colleagues is at the capitol right now dealing with education and legislation. He is providing testimony, but there are other districts where that would not be acceptable because they want you in the district on a daily basis. I feel our district has a good balance of both.

State networking. *At the state level, I attend the fall conferences and the spring retreats. I have been on the Midwest State Association of Elementary School Principals (MSAESP) board for a few years. Those meetings are usually held in the central area of the state so all principals can easily attend. I will drive to those meetings as they are usually held in connection with a conference, which makes it nice. We have conference calls and maybe four or five face-to-face meetings throughout the year. It is worth it.*

In addition to serving on the MSAESP board, I have been the MSAESP Governor for this region of the state. This has been a positive organization for understanding what is going on around the state and for helping me network. The organization has kept me informed of some of the hot topics coming out of the state department. I always think just because we are way out here in the northwest area does not mean we don't have an obligation to know what is going on in the department of education. I believe we have to be directly involved in it. I cannot tell you how many emails a day I get, but being involved in the issues firsthand makes all the difference. I really enjoy my role in MSAESP. Recently, I hosted the Midwest State Association of Secondary School Principals (MSASSP) fall luncheon. The members of the organization encourage you to host activities such as the luncheon.

I am also a member of the Midwest State School Superintendents Association (MSSSA). I have gone to some of their meetings. They hosted a wonderful conference for new superintendents this past summer. They had veteran superintendents presenting on a variety of informational topics; it was excellent. Then the following day it was the MSSSA conference for all superintendents. I am just learning the makeup of MSSSA. I am involved only as a participant at this point, where in some of these other organizations I have been involved at the leadership level. It will be a while before I could serve at the leadership level on MSSSA. There

are a lot of experienced superintendents out there who have been at this a long time, and the larger district superintendents run the show.

Unsettled Talk

Gwyneth is new to the superintendent social circle; therefore, she takes a more reserved role within their organization. Yet, while she is the first female superintendent to run her school district, she does so without hesitation and believes she encounters no obstacles in her path.

A feeling of belonging. *Yes, I do encounter a sense of not belonging in circles where I am not well known, like MSSSA. When you are the new kid on the block and you are a woman, there is a sense of not being a part of the group. In the smaller, local circles where I am known, I do not feel that way. In fact, sometimes I am the one providing information to others because I am the one who stays very involved in what is happening in the legislature and state education department. Because I attended the governmental relations meeting here in February, I and another female colleague were the ones sharing the information from the meeting to all the men at our regional superintendents meeting. In other circles, I say very little. Our district is part of the lawsuit over school funding. There are superintendents from small to large districts involved in that lawsuit. Because I am a new kid on the block in that circle, I am a silent participant. It just depends. Sometimes it is hard to have a voice at the table. Some of that is due to being a new superintendent, while some of it has to do with being a female superintendent.*

I have never felt excluded here in this district. Never. I am assuming it is because I have been here for 21 years. I'm assuming that is probably why. Everybody knows my work and what I've done. Since I have worked in this district, there have been nine superintendents. I am the first female superintendent for the district, ever. I have never experienced any pushback from anyone, even as the first woman superintendent.

Ties that bind. *My family definitely plays a role when it comes to my job. My husband hauls crude oil for a living. He has a good job, so we are geographically tied to this area. Family has kept us from leaving. And then our children started getting involved in school. When they start getting into junior high and high school, changing schools is hard.*

Harriett

The barriers are falling down more and more [for women]. But I still think they are there. There is still a good-ol'-boy system. There truly, truly is. And there are some out there who are within the ranks of superintendent who do not want women to encroach. You can just tell sometimes by their demeanor. As they retire, I hope it gets better. I think the younger generation is a lot more open to "show me your skills not your gender."

Introduction

Harriett is a 50-year old Caucasian woman and a first-year superintendent. Due to choosing family over career, she has only 19 years in the profession. She spent 10 of those years as a classroom teacher, 3 years as a building principal, and 5 years as an assistant superintendent. She is currently an AA superintendent for a district comprised of approximately 900 students. Her district is located in the northeast area of the state.

Harriett is married and the mother of two grown sons. She grew up in central Midwest State and graduated from a large suburban high school. Her personal experience as a high school student is what drives her to provide alternative educational opportunities for the students in her district. Harriett is pursuing a doctorate in educational administration.

Path to the Superintendency

Harriett has had a fairly typical path to the superintendent chair—teacher to principal to assistant superintendent to superintendent. Not only was her path to the superintendency typical as studies have shown for women, but her pace to getting to the superintendency was also very similar. Harriett's pace was deliberately slow as she chose to first raise her family first and then attend graduate school.

Family first. *I graduated from a suburban high school in central Midwest State in 1980. I graduated midterm because my mother had broken her back, which required a five level fusion. My father had been out of work, and I needed to be home to help with family responsibilities. I was able to graduate midterm by completing an independent study program with my high school principal. He was very understanding. That experience leads to my belief that alternative education is important for some students. Without the opportunity to get my diploma via an alternative route, I might have been a dropout.*

I married my high school sweetheart at a young age. At the time we married, he had decided it was more important for him to get his college degree than it was for me, which was fine. Together, we had two sons; they are 29 and 31 years old now. Both of them are great kids, but they are complete polar opposites. One of them right now is the vice president of a bank, and the other one works in the aircraft industry.

Me first. *My father and my grandfather were both custodians in public schools. I was very proud of what they did and grateful for their forceful push. They told me if I went into education to please do something besides being a custodian. So, I started out as a bus driver when my kids were still little. I drove school busses when we lived both in the northeast and central areas of the state. Then I got divorced. In the process of going through the divorce, I*

knew I needed to do something with my life. Plus, I wanted to prove my ex-husband wrong. I decided to enroll in college and become an elementary school teacher. I finished my degree in three and a half years.

Acting assistant superintendent. *I taught middle school science at a large suburban middle school for ten years. As a teacher, I took on a lot of leadership roles in the school. I wrote the science curriculum for our district and was appointed Middle School Science Department Chair. I was very involved in professional development. Because of my involvement, I was encouraged to obtain my administrative license. I took a job as principal for two years in Chesterfield, which is part of the Wake Center school district. By this time, my children started having children of their own. I found it more and more difficult to be so far away from them. I had remarried, and my husband and I decided we wanted to be around the children and grandchildren. We made the decision to move back to central Midwest State, and I took a principal job at the middle school in Vail Valley. I was only a principal for one year before being moved up to the assistant superintendent position. I was leading the district's professional development, the mentoring program, and several district initiatives. When the assistant superintendent suddenly vacated the position in the second semester, the superintendent came to me and said, "I really think you are the person who should fill the assistant superintendent job." Beginning the second semester, I was principal and acting assistant superintendent.*

Assistant superintendent. *The following year, I officially interviewed with the board of education for the position I had been holding. I was internally transferred from principal to assistant superintendent. The position was not advertised nor opened up for others to apply. It was just a lateral transfer. But, I did interview with the school board. I think they were looking for someone who could work well with the superintendent and put in the 80 hours a week needed*

to get the job done. There was a lot to do. I had been working on getting into a superintendent or assistant superintendent position. I had already completed my district level licensure. So, it was really a dream for this to all happen the way it did. I think a lot of it happened because of all the extra hours and effort I put into the job. I built programs and did a lot of work just within the six months of accepting the role. I took the initiative to get things done.

Superintendent. *I left Vail Valley after five years when I sought and found this superintendent job. This is my first year at Fallstown. And, yes, I was actively seeking this position because I wanted to take that next jump to the superintendency. I do not want to say negative things about my previous district, but the direction the school board was moving was not really conducive to my philosophy and core beliefs. I wanted to be in a district more aligned to my core beliefs, as well as one that was moving in the positive direction I believed education should be going. I believe Fallstown is a good fit for me. I also think I had what Fallstown was looking for in a leader. One of the things I was told is they wanted somebody who could really build relationships. While that is not something I am known for, I really do work at building relationships because it is very important. They also wanted somebody who really cared about the kids. I care too much about them sometimes. Now, I'm working on my doctorate. It hasn't killed me yet, but it has been getting close.*

Family. *I have been in the education profession for 19 years now. I got into the profession very late at age 31, due to putting my family first. I did not even get my education until I went through my divorce. Because of those choices, I cannot retire for nine more years. But I also made a conscious decision not to pursue a superintendent job until my boys were grown. I first thought I would only want to be a teacher. When people started pushing me toward administration early on, I decided I would not go back to college until my children were*

in high school. I also decided I would not enter into administration until my kids were grown and gone because I wanted to be a mother first. When you are a principal, your principal duties come first and then you have a life after that. I did not want to my children to come second. Therefore, I did not enter administration until both of my boys had graduated high school.

My husband is 11 years older than I am and could technically retire from education. He has always followed me. He went with me to Wake Center and was one of the teachers I supervised. When we moved back to Vail Valley, he was offered his old job back in a neighboring district. They wanted him back. Eventually, he was offered a position at Vail Valley with me. His initial plan was to retire when we moved up here to Fallstown. But, financially it made more sense for him to keep working. Because he is later in his career than I am, we have always put my career first.

Community Connections

I am involved in some of the community organizations. One I belong to is called the Fallstown Foundation for Economic Development. I am also involved in Kiwanis. I currently serve on the Recreation Commission Board, the Prevention Board, and the Preschool Board. I was asked to be a part of the Preschool Board as a representative of the school district. I am involved in Big Brothers and Big Sisters. We also have two local organizations our district partners with. The first is the Fallstown Education Foundation, and the second is a business roundtable. In the latter organization, I meet with community leaders four to five times a year to discuss different options for businesses to support the schools and for schools to support the businesses. Lastly, I am involved in the Fallstown Chamber of Commerce.

I am crazy busy. The one thing I do not do right here in the community is attend church. I attend in a neighboring community because I discovered while at Vail Valley where you attend

church can cause issues. I did not want that to happen here. I do not want my work life interfering with my spiritual life.

Professional Networks

Harriett purposefully networked and made connections. She is involved in several key professional organizations and knows these connections will pay dividends down the road.

Networking with search consultants. *I made a lot of contact with the superintendent search consultants from the state school boards association and wanted to know about the vacancies they had posted. I actively put my name out there so they knew I was seriously looking for a superintendent position. I talked to Hank Jeffries and Palmer Mayfield, both men were key search consultants. I reached out to the guys up there and said, “I want you to help me find a superintendent job that is a good fit. Where would you recommend? They asked, “Are you willing to move?” I replied, “I’m not tied anywhere. My children are both grown, and I am done having children. So, I’m not tied to any particular place.” At that point, I put my application in at a few districts where the school boards association consultants were in charge of the search process. Palmer would call me and say, “Have you thought of such and such?” I told him I would apply at his recommendation. He said, “Harriett, I think Fallstown is going to fit with what you want.” We discussed it at length, and I put in my application. I was one of four selected to interview.*

The interview was a full, long day from morning until evening with the last part culminating in an interview with the school board. I met with community members, principals, and various district groups. I wanted to make sure I left the school board with some documents to remember me because interviews can become very convoluted. I left them with two items—my

core belief statements and my plan for the first 90 days on the job. I wanted them to remember me. And they did.

The year before I took this job, I had talked to Hank and Palmer at the United School Administrators (USA) conference. They were running a vendor booth at the conference. I went up to them and stated, “Guys, I’m not ready this year. But I will be next year. Walk me through the process of applying for a superintendent job. What do I need to do? What do you expect from me?” When I was ready the next year, I gave them a call and said, “I’m really serious. I really want to do this. It is time for my husband and me to move. Work with me on this.” And they did. I do not think there was any favoritism. I think they help anyone who asks. What I really appreciated was just talking with them about vacant positions. They would tell me what they knew about the board of education and about the trends in the district. It gave me an insight I would not have otherwise had. I only wanted to apply to places that might be a good fit. I wanted to apply to districts where I would readily accept the position if offered. If you do not know anything about a place, you have a tendency to put too many applications out there. So, I asked a lot of questions. The other thing I did was to attend the school boards association trainings. If I had not talked to Hank for a while, I would run over to his office and talk to him. If I had not talked to Palmer in a while, I would visit with him too. I would have conversations with both of those guys because I wanted them to get to know me.

I also participated in a webinar teleconference call with a search firm in a neighboring state. I did that in order to fully understand their search process. I compared it to a college class. You have to know what the professor wants before you are going to get through the class. Similarly, you have to know what the search committee is looking for before you start the application process. Once I put my application in at Fallstown, I started really investigating and

talking to people who knew about the district, as well as other locations I had applied. I still keep in touch with the superintendent at Wake Center. Because he previously worked at one of the districts where I applied, I asked him a lot of questions. I said, “I know they know you. You know me. Can I use you as a reference?” I figured that was a good way to get someone at the district to at least look at my application. The other thing I think helped me when looking for a job was making contact with other people in education organizations and being involved—like MSSSA, the association for human resource personnel, and the curriculum association folks, too. You never know if you are going to run into somebody who might know somebody else who could help you network.

Membership in professional organizations. *I think the more involved you are in the different professional organizations the more people get to know you. I have been involved both as an assistant superintendent and now as a superintendent. I still belong to the same organizations. I belong to the superintendent association—MSSSA. I belong to the association for personnel directors. I have always been a member of Midwest State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (MSASCD) and the national organization ASCD. I also belong to the Council for Career Technical Education.*

I would say probably the most influential organization I belong to is MSSSA. Even though I was an assistant superintendent when I first joined, I still became a member because of that position. Networking is asking questions and being willing to attend the trainings and visiting with people afterwards over drinks or dancing. I am not saying make a fool of yourself, but at least mingle with your peers. The more you are around the powerful individuals, someone will eventually ask, “Have you heard of Harriett?” You want them to respond, “Oh yeah, I know her.” And I want them to know me personally, not just as a name on paper. So, I think the

MSSSA organization is really helpful. Like I said, just doing the work with them has made a big difference. Right now I am just a member of the organizations. But if they have special committees, then I try to volunteer. For instance, I am helping with the new superintendent workshop.

Club exclusion. *Unfortunately, when I belonged to the superintendents association as an assistant superintendent, I felt like an outsider. I tried not to let that get to me so much. If they did not ask what my position was when I attended meetings, I would not tell them. Until you get to an actual superintendent position, I think you are looked down upon a little bit. And I feel like I can say that now because I feel more accepted in certain organizations now than I did before I was a superintendent. I always felt I was being excluded. But seeing and comparing it now, I definitely know I was.*

Some groups are harder to belong than others. There is still some of the good-ol'-boy system, which makes it hard to get your foot in the door. But, I am working on it. If there is an opportunity to network, I will go to a meeting. It may not be a meeting I really think I have time for, but I make time so I can go and introduce myself and meet people. One of the groups I have been blessed to be invited to be a part of is the multi-state superintendent group. It is a select group of people. It is really nice to belong. Some of the superintendents who are harder to get to know are there. So being there, I think will benefit me.

Getting out there. *I do attend the Council of Superintendents meetings. I will go to them to see what is going on especially if there is a hot topic during the legislative session. I will go down to the legislative floor and see how all of it works. And again, just getting out there – do I have time to do this? No, not really, but I make it happen. I am more fully informed, too. Not only does it help me, but it also helps our district when I am more involved. There are some*

districts whose superintendents never attend. I do not know the superintendents of some districts because I have never seen any of them at our meetings. I do have a slight advantage being located so close to the state capitol. Although, I will say I went to those things when I was at Vail Valley. It was a five-hour round-trip drive. But it still gave me the chance to be able to know what was going on. A lot of times, to be honest with you, I would go on days when we did not have school or we had in-service. I was taking my personal time to attend.

Unsettled Talk

While Harriett had encountered gender bias in her previous job at a larger district, she had not encountered any in her new job. She sees herself as the collective woman and that together women have made a positive difference. However, Harriet states she is unwillingly to take risks and will not enter into roles where she knows gender inequity exists.

Making progress. *So far in this new position, I have not had to overcome any challenges as far as being a woman superintendent. The biggest challenge has been following a fabulous superintendent with an incredible reputation. The challenges come in a bigger district. I had more challenges in my previous job. I can say that because the school board president made it very clear the entire time I was there, even when I interviewed for the assistant superintendent position. He always felt the position for a woman was not as the leader but always subordinate to a male superintendent.*

Recently one of the larger districts down by Vail Valley was in the hiring process for a new assistant superintendent. I have been visiting with people I know, and they said they would be very surprised if the school board hired a woman. We are more likely to see a large district like that hiring a man. And that is why it is important to build a relationship with the search consultant guys. They will tell you information like that. I am not going to put my name in for a

position where the leadership is going to tell a woman “no way.” I am not going to put myself out there like that. That is why you find out about those districts before you ever put your name in the hat.

Women are making some progress. We have three women who are now in charge of large districts in the state. We are making progress. But I still think the stigma is out there that men are supposed to lead.

Shirley

Bold is kind of my hallmark.... I love a challenge, and I love to win.... I have never felt purposefully discriminated against. I think as a woman people just underestimate you more than anything else. It just makes us work harder. I think there were times that I probably got a job because I was a woman; I think I surprised them with the kind of woman I was.

Introduction

Shirley is a Caucasian woman in her mid-50s. She has been a superintendent for the past six years, with all six years in the same district. Her path to the superintendency includes 12 years as a teacher, 9 years as principal, and 6 years as a district level administrator for a total of 33 years. She currently leads an AA school district in the south central area of the state. Shirley is married and has one daughter and two granddaughters.

Path to the Superintendency

Shirley did not travel a typical path to the superintendent seat. She spent her career following her husband as his career grew, and she took the jobs that came with those moves. She went from teacher to elementary principal to teacher to assistant superintendent to middle school

principal to assistant superintendent to superintendent. Often the leadership positions she landed were at the behest of her boss reaching out to her and requesting she apply. When she chose to accept a superintendent position, her husband made the decision to follow her career.

Math teacher. *I grew up all over the state. By the time I was 18, my family had moved 21 times. My dad ironically was an educator, but he liked to move. Sometimes we would move multiple times within an area, and he would stay in the same job. But we'd move to different towns and different houses. My mother stayed at home, or else she worked in general labor type jobs like at a K-mart or a chicken house.*

I graduated up in the northeast are of the state from Dalton High School, but I only went there for two months. I had gone to Upland most of my high school career. I lived in large urban areas, and I had a lot of varying school experiences. I had the privilege of attending a lot of different sized schools, which was really a neat thing. I enjoyed it. I was heavily involved with music and theater. When I went to college, I planned to major in theater. However, reality set in when my dad came to see a production I was in. He said, "This is not going to earn a living." In defiance, I said, "Fine, I'll just become a teacher and teach math," which I thought was really going to hurt him. But, it ended up helping me immensely. I had an elementary degree with a math minor.

In the '70s when I graduated, teaching jobs were tough to come by. I was fortunate enough to get a job at one of the highest paid districts in the state because they were building a power plant. I made \$8500 a year. My husband was finishing his senior year at college, while I taught elementary in an open classroom. After my husband finished his degree, we moved to Centerville, and I taught middle school math. Our daughter came along during this time.

Elementary principal. *At the ripe old age of 26 or 27, I landed a job as a computer consultant for the public schools in Centerville. It was simply because I was not afraid of those old computers. I had the opportunity to design and implement the first elementary computer lab for the Centerville public schools. It was a fun, creative job, and it was right up my alley. My husband then accepted a new job, so we left the northeastern area of the state and moved to the central area. I decided I wanted to stay home with our daughter. Eventually, I started doing some substituting and ended up coaching tennis at the high school. When my daughter started school, I took a teaching job. My being a teacher lasted only a year before the superintendent came to me and said, "Would you like to be the elementary principal?" I was not certified, so we agreed I would be director of elementary education while I finished my master's degree. I was the elementary principal for one year before we relocated once again. My husband wanted to move up in his career, so I took an elementary principalship at Garville. They called and offered me the job, and I accepted the job without ever having seen the building. The superintendent videotaped the interviews and showed them to the board; that was how they made their selection. It was an interesting approach.*

Math teacher to assistant superintendent. *I walked into the building the first time in July to find out I was a principal of an open concept building, which meant classrooms had no walls. We did a lot of team teaching and project-based learning. I stayed there for a couple of years, and then my husband took a position in Trapp City. Of course, I went with him. I had an interview at a small rural school for a principal position. When talking with the superintendent of the rural school, I mentioned we had found a house close to the elementary school in Trapp City. I was excited about that. But the superintendent said, "If you're going to be our principal, your daughter will need to attend school here." I withdraw my name for the job because a small*

school was not what I wanted for her. So, I was still without a job when I got a call from the school district in Trapp City asking me if I would take a middle school math position. I loved teaching and was happy to do it. I taught three or four years, I think. Then one evening I got a call from the superintendent. He said, "I want you to know we just came out of our board meeting, and the board has voted unanimously that you and Mr. Thompson will be district administrative assistants working with me." I said, "You mean at the district office as an assistant to the superintendent?" He said, "Yes. You'll be in charge of elementary education and state and federal programs."

Pay inequity. *I went to a meeting the next morning with Mr. Thompson to meet with the superintendent and discuss our new positions. He presented a salary package for the two of us. I had been a practicing administrator and had previous experience. Mr. Thompson had been in Trapp City as program director his entire career, but he had never been a building principal. When I saw the difference in our salaries, I immediately thought this is not going to happen. I said, "I am glad that you didn't null my teaching contract because I won't be coming up here for that kind of salary difference between our two positions." There was a lot of sputtering and stammering and eventually it came out that Mr. Thompson, who was going to be the finance director, had been allowed to calculate our salaries. He based it strictly on years of experience in education, not on quality of experience. He said, "I've been here such and such number of years." I said, "And you've never been a building administrator. If we were looking at a teaching position, then that is how you'd calculate salaries. But, administration is based on your experience and the depth of your background. Mine is richer than yours. I'm perfectly happy to continue teaching. Thanks for the opportunity." I walked out shaking in my boots, not believing*

I had the nerve to say that. I did really like teaching, so I was okay with it. I was pretty bold. Bold is kind of my hallmark.

I got a call right away from the superintendent apologizing. He said, "I should have known that. I should have looked at it closer. I should have anticipated what your response would be. Come back up. I have another number." So I went back up, and it was a fair difference. I thought I could live with that. For four years, I was at the district office, and eventually Mr. Thompson and I would become superintendent and assistant superintendent. We were a good mix because our personalities were different enough. We had some clashes, but they were always professional. We did some really good things in the time we were leading the district.

Middle school principal. *We had a middle school principal who was retiring. By this time, I had figured out the people who impact change in the district and who make a difference in education were building principals. I still believe that. I believe it is the most important job in the entire system. Classroom teachers can impact a classroom full of children, but a building principal changes a school culture. Therefore, I asked the superintendent if he would allow me to be the middle school principal. He did not want to do that. He and I were purchased as a team, and he liked the contrasting personality and skills we brought. But I insisted I needed to be the building principal of the middle school to make the kind of change the district wanted. It was the best job I ever had. I loved it. Middle school was my deal, and I could do it again in a heartbeat. I held that position for seven years. We did some super things. I still stay in touch with a lot of the students from that little building of 350 kids.*

Assistant superintendent. *Our superintendent retired. The assistant superintendent decided she did not want to work for the new superintendent coming in. She did not feel like he*

was a person she could work with. She left and took another job. The new superintendent asked me if I would consider coming back because we had nobody who really had a history with the district. By that time, my daughter was in college so I said, "Yeah, I would do that. I would come back." I went back for a couple more years and was assistant superintendent again in Trapp City. I liked it. The superintendent gave me a lot of leadership opportunities. It became pretty apparent I was being allowed a lot of autonomy to run aspects of the district without the authority or the salary of the superintendent. He was a great guy who believed in the power of relationships and trust. I learned a lot from him.

Superintendent. *A couple years later I got an interesting email. I had been president of a state organization and worked with a lot of different people on the board. I got an email from one of the guys who had worked on the board; he also worked on superintendent search committees. He said, "You really need to look at the Crownpoint opening." I emailed back and flippantly stated they wanted a doctorate, and I was really happy with what I was doing. He emailed me a couple more times, called me once, and emailed me back another couple of times. One day had been kind of crappy, and I thought, "Well, really, I got this certification." My daughter was pregnant with her first child and living within driving distance of Crownpoint. I thought, "If nothing else, I'll find out if I'm marketable and if a superintendency is even anything I'd be interested in." I applied at the last minute. I got my paperwork in the day it was due; I was really lackadaisical about it. I figured I could take it or leave it; I'm okay either way. I was called for an interview. For the first time in my life, I interviewed completely myself without trying to give the answers I thought the school board wanted to hear. They were the answers I truly believed. They called and offered me the job. To my surprise, I immediately said yes. I did not negotiate or anything. They had lost their superintendent mid-year and were really in a*

tough spot with accreditation. The district was on an improvement plan with the state board of education. Those issues culminated in the community having a pretty poor perception of the school system. Those were pretty dark days.

When I interviewed, I participated in a community reception. The community told me they lacked confidence in the education system. I love a challenge, and I love to win. My previous experiences had been in school improvement, so it was a good fit. We came off of improvement as soon as we really invested in an improvement plan. From day one, my message to the staff was, "We're going to hang our hats on formative assessments because it is absolutely the most important activity with progress monitoring we can do." It has served us well. Now we have to get deeper, and we still have a ways to go. This is my sixth year, and I just signed another contract for two more years. That will take me a year past retirement, which I never thought I would do. I thought I would retire the minute I had my retirement points. But in six years, we have come off improvement and gone from zero to over three-dozen standards of excellence. And we passed a multi-million dollar bond issue when nobody else in the state was passing them.

***Chosen for my leadership style.** There were two women and three men who were called to interview for the Crownpoint superintendency. I do not know why they chose me. I am really direct, and I think the guy before me was a really nice guy. I think districts tend to swing in personalities with leadership. You always seem to think you want what you do not have. I think it probably came down to the difference between our two leadership styles. I am admittedly known as a hatchet man. I do not tolerate poor leadership. My first year, I sent one of the principals packing. Since then, I have sent two others packing. I do not hesitate to do that because life is too short, and the principal is the most important person in the district.*

Family. *When I was offered the job at Crownpoint, my husband was still working in Trapp City. He had accomplished a lot and was highly respected. We decided I would take the job and he would go with me. When people asked him why he was doing that, he would just reply, "Shirley has spent her whole life following my career, and now it's time for me to follow hers." So, we decided I would take this job. If he could find something, he would come with me. If he did not find another job, then we would just see each other on weekends. We would do what we needed to. But I knew he had a good enough reputation on his own that it was going to be easy for him to land a job. And as I suspected, he walked right into a new position nearby. That was good. He only had a few years before he was eligible to retire—unlike me, he did not layout and take out his retirement money when our daughter was born—I did. If you are a woman who has a family, it is hard. It is hard. I am not home at nights. I am not home any night of the week most weeks. If you are young and have children, it is tough to do. Men can do it, but it is different. We still, by nature, nurture our children.*

Community Connections

Like many of the other women superintendents in this study, Shirley is a part of formal community organizations because she feels it is required of her as the superintendent. Shirley has also learned where the informal community connections are made and does not hesitate to communicate and network through them.

Formal connections. *I am in a lot of organizations because of my job. Rotary is an organization I belong to because it is expected by my board. I do not know that I would belong to it otherwise. It is made up of business leaders or business owners. I do not have a lot in common with most of them. I like the service side of it, the philanthropic part. I like to raise money for scholarships. I continue to keep my ties to performance through church choir, and I*

belonged for a long time to a group of vocalists who traveled the state and performed. I keep that connection now by being active in some statewide productions each year. I take a week of vacation every summer and go out to Trapp city and produce a show. And I am co-executive director of a scholarship organization for women now. That consumes a great deal of my off-work time.

I am on the board for the local fitness center here. That is because I am the superintendent of schools. They support our students with many programs. I think it is important I demonstrate commitment to them because they demonstrate commitment to our students. I am on the economic development board. It is critical for me as the superintendent to do what I can to promote the growth of the Crownpoint community. The local economy has a direct impact on our budget and our district.

Informal connections. *We have a group here in town I call the cartel. They are all very active in the community. Once a week they meet at a local hangout where they like to talk about making decisions on everything that goes on in the community. I laugh about the cartel, but in my own way I am a member. I can be when I want to be. If I had an issue to discuss with them, I would not hesitate to go sit down and talk to them.*

At times, I am the one who organizes the administrators to go have a beer. Sometimes that is where you network, and that is what you have to do. It is different though when you are the superintendent. You cannot have the friendships that sometimes build better networks. It is really true that as superintendent you are always the superintendent, no matter where you go or what you do.

Professional Networks

Shirley is involved in many of the same organizations as the other participants in this study; however, she appears to be less concerned with staying connected and involved today. Perhaps, as she says, this is due to her being in the final stages of her career.

Organizations. *Early on, I got involved in organizations as a worker bee. I would work on something so people would recognize my name. After a while, you get asked or invited to be a member of the group. Once I became president of a state organization, I became involved in everything. That just happens.*

I think there is social networking you have to have with your peers to survive. I think my active involvement from day one—even with the state association of math teachers—has been about good networking. When I later became involved with Midwest State Learning First Alliance, I made a lot of connections.

I think there used to be more networking than there is now. That is the kind of networking that we sometimes get at the United School Administrators (USA) conference. I am concerned about the USA organization right now and the ability to network with them. Maybe it is because I am at the end of my career. I am waning. I am a few years away from retirement. So, I may not value those times as much as I once did. But it seems to me we used to go to USA and network with retired educators. This whole list of elders shared their experience at the conference. There was always a reception, and everyone went. You would be able to reconnect. The USA board—the organizational boards—I learned so much from so many of those folks. I still hold those friendships close.

At one time in USA, we had a former school administrator as the executive director. She had been a building principal. She had the presence and experience that made you feel she

could be a resource for helping you find the right people to connect with. Then we made a conscious decision as an organization to move toward lobbying. That is good when lobbying worked. Lobbying does not work anymore. Now we do not have anybody serving in a role as a resource for administrators. And we need that too.

The Midwest Association of Elementary School Principals was also a pretty good network. I do not see people doing as much networking as we used to. The social part was where we really had a lot of good interaction. We got to know people, and sometimes it was just stupid. There were some times it was just sitting around telling jokes, and it was not even professional conversations. But you got to know other people you could contact when things came up. I got a lot of ideas from sitting around those tables and visiting with people. You meet a lot of people with a lot of different ideas.

I am also a member of a multi-state superintendent group. That organization is a lot about going and talking with someone who is doing your same job in another state. You find out that what you are doing is okay. Your job is not unique; we are all dealing with pretty much the same issues.

Key organizations to make connections. *I am a member of MSSSA, but I do not recommend it as the organization for aspiring superintendents to make connections. I think that group is really for practicing superintendents. I belonged to it before I became a superintendent. But you do not really belong to it if you are not a superintendent. It really is true. I felt it then and still see it now. I think one thing you have to do is go to things. You have to attend meetings and conferences. I think anything you can do to make yourself more aware of what is going on in the state is probably most helpful. That said, there were five candidates for this job, and two of us were women. We all were involved. State department committee work helps the most. I*

think anything you can do to be on committees at the state level really helps you make key connections. I was on a state professional board for a while. That helped me make connections that were probably cross-position more than anything else.

Role models. *I write a ton of reference letters. In a career of 36 years, I know a lot of people. I like to think the leadership opportunities I have taken on in the state have helped me have a voice for other people. My references have some credibility. I do not write a reference I do not believe in. People know that about me. To get an honest reference from me is a big deal.*

Women. *I have been really lucky because I have had a lot of women who have been great role models. They have demonstrated different kinds of strong female leadership through their personalities, which has taught me a lot of different ways to think and respond. Julie was the president of our local college when I first came. She was a wonderful mentor to me for six years. Our leadership styles are not at all similar. But, we shared some similarities, and she helped temper me in a lot of situations. She gave me a different perspective on things. Dorothea at Wellsville-Anthony and the superintendent of Kingston have been good female role models in the superintendency for me. Having somebody else who walks in those same shoes as you—someone who has to go home and fix supper, who misses her kids' band concerts because they are at some other kid's track meet—makes a difference. When you go through the whole thing of being an athletic director—the kinds of things that are rare for most women, even if they are professional women—it helps to have other women to connect with. In the school business, you sacrifice more than you do in other businesses. Men do too. My high school principal stands at our basketball games and watches them. He is constantly under scrutiny because people think he is only watching because his son is playing. It is tough to be a school person. It really is. Relationships help balance that quite a bit.*

Men. I had good mentoring from men too. The first year I was in central Midwest State as director of elementary education, the superintendent who was soon to retire was an old guy. He made me learn facilities. He made me learn to walk the playground each year when I did my capital outlay requests and look for whether or not the swings were worn. We would walk around the building together to see if it needed to be tuck-pointed.

When I was new to the superintendency and needed support, I called a lot of guys. I really did. It was only because I did not know Dorothea and the other women superintendents as well as I do now. I might have called Julie. But at that point I was new. The people I knew mostly were men. Hank Jefferies and I had been friends for a long time. Ironically, he had been superintendent here. So when I got this job, he immediately reached out and said, "I can be your mentor." But the state organization said, "No, you two are too much alike. You can't be paired up. That would be bad. You're crazy people." So John Littlefield became my mentor. I did not reach out to John as much as I could have. It just depended on what the need was. If I felt it was something where I needed to have a buffer to my personality, I might call my friend Jim. If I needed to get fired up about something, I would call Hank Jefferies. He would support me and get fired up. So, it just depended on what I needed. Sometimes I would contact previous superintendents who taught as adjunct college professors. From time to time, I did call Marcia who was way out west. I would call her every once in a while because we became acquainted through a lot of school improvement activities. I would call her. I did not call men just because they were men, but because there were more of them.

Unsettled Talk

Shirley has a solid sense about the challenges women face as superintendents versus what men deal with. Her tactic has been to learn from other successful women leaders and

superintendents. Her success has come in knowing that people perceive female leaders differently than they do male leaders. But she has not let that stop her from being a quality leader.

Challenges women face. *Typically if you are an aggressive woman, you are seen as a bitch. As a man, you are not. That is a difficult thing to deal with. Your best defense on that is to build relationships. I really believe that. People know I am direct. They know I am tough. Every person who works for me knows I am tough. There have been men who have struggled with having a woman who is their supervisor. I still have one who does, and he knows I am not going away. The women I have had the privilege of working with—and many of them are top-notch people—have given me insight by the way they respond to things. I think women have the same challenges men have. But it is just that whole perception that you cannot say exactly the same thing a man says, and it is all because you are a woman. The beauty of sitting in this seat is you may be a woman, but you still have that power of authority and position. People might call you a bitch. If you can live through that, you are going to be able to make a difference. It is a minor thing.*

It is harder for a woman. It is harder. I will give you a classic example how women have to work harder. You have to turn your head. When we were mid-bond issue, one of the things I did was go to all the coffee shops and attend all the little coffee groups that met around town. I went to the senior citizen center every week on bingo day, and I met with them to answer their questions. I basically took out our informational brochure and said, “Let me answer your questions.” I took a lot of tough questions, and I had a lot of people tell me they were not voting for it no matter what. When I went to a local restaurant where a group of older gentlemen were having coffee, they made it apparent they did not want the bond issue. They did not want to pay

for it. One of them said, “Well, if you want new schools so bad, why don’t you just sleep with the city manager. He gets everything he wants.” My answer to him was, “I think we’ll try it this way instead,” and I just moved on. I told my board about that and they were incensed, furious. To make matters worse, one of the board members said, “Tell me who it was. I’m going to take him out. I’m going to call him out.” I said, “You’re missing the point. I handled it. It’s done.”

The sentiment is that when there is no other argument to be made, then it becomes about your being a woman. That can be hard. That is hard to manage. People tend to think that you are going to act on emotion rather than on intellect. You spend a lot of time dealing with things like that. You will still have the same bullies you had in high school when you were a female leader then. Those same boys who caused trouble in high school just grow up to be men.

Discrimination. *I have never felt purposefully discriminated against. I think as a woman people just underestimate you more than anything else. It just makes us work harder. I think there were times I probably got a job because I was a woman. I think I surprised them with the kind of woman I was.*

Peggie

I would say that my route was paved by the slogan “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” I was a latecomer to this game. When I look around the room, there are either guys who have been superintendents for decades, or there are guys who are just starting out—and they are young enough to be my son.

Introduction

Peggie is a Caucasian woman in her mid-50s. She is currently the superintendent of a small AA district in central Midwest State. She has been in education for 28 years and is in the

first year of her first superintendency. Prior to being a superintendent, she spent 19 years as an English teacher, 3 years as an assistant principal, and 5 years as an assistant superintendent.

Peggie grew up and attended community college and a four-year university in the same central area that she is now superintendent. She is married and has a son and daughter.

Path to the Superintendency

Peggie loved being an English teacher and never set out to be in administration. However, a tap on the shoulder by her principal and superintendent set her on the path to her eventual superintendency. What Peggie lacked in self-confidence, she made up in determination and sacrifice.

Determined to overcome challenges. *I graduated high school from Highline, which is only about three miles from Trapp City. My dad was a history teacher and coach, but he got out of education. I believe when I started junior high, we moved back here to Trapp City where his parents and my mom's parents are from. After graduation, I attended Trapp City Community College and started dating my now husband. And as the twists and turns of life would have it, we got married and I had our first child seven months later. We settled in Trapp City.*

My goal was to get a college degree, and I was going to make it happen come hell or high water. I loved English and loved writing. So, after community college I drove back and forth 80 miles one-way to the closest university in order to get my undergraduate teaching degree. I am very thankful my mother-in-law took care of my daughter. We worked it out no matter what obstacles we faced. The challenge for me was my husband would not move. He's a farm boy. He just was not comfortable being outside of Trapp City.

English teacher. *When it got tough, I would jokingly say I was quitting to go work at Dillon's as a grocer checker. I ended up doing my student teaching at Trapp City, which worked*

out well because the school system was able to know me better. Plus, they were going to have an English opening. When I graduated, they advertised the opening. Of course, I applied. But, they did not hire me. Instead, they hired a guy because they also needed a football coach. So, I did some substitute teaching and filled in sometimes at the community college. I might have laid out a couple of years even. I had some opportunities for teaching at the college and some long-term substitute work at the school. I finally got my foot in the door and landed a teaching position in Trapp City. I taught twelve years here.

Then I got older and wiser. My daughter had graduated from high school, and my son was getting ready to start high school. I told my husband I was not going to die having only been in the Trapp City school district. I shocked a lot of people, including my superintendent. But I had some good connections. The superintendent of Moline School District had been my dad's superintendent when he was teaching. Because I knew the superintendent of Moline, I called and asked him if he had any openings since they were only 80 miles from Trapp City. I knew they had an English position open. He had me interview. Back then Moline was still relatively small. The interview was very informal. They probably cannot do that now, but nevertheless I got the job. I found an apartment near Moline, and I commuted back and forth. I would spend the night when I needed to. Of course, my son was involved in activities and athletics by this time. I wanted to move him to Moline, but my husband was not going to let that happen. For better or for worse, it was one of the best things I could have done for me. I taught, got involved in school improvement, and had many opportunities. Once I started getting involved in school improvement, I realized I was going to need to go back to school. I needed to do something, or I would have been grading research papers every weekend for the rest of my

career. I was interested in getting my Masters in English, but then I realized I would still be grading papers. So, I decided upon a Masters in Administration.

A reluctant assistant principal. I went to Eastern University, a private liberal arts college, for my administrative degree. We joke about the “Eastern way” because it is the fast track to administration. I knew that. As far as my personal standards, I felt like I was selling out. But by the same token, it was beneficial because they had people in the field who were principals and superintendents teaching the classes. I felt their teaching gave me a practical perspective. I received my degree, but at that point I wasn’t really ready to get an administrative job. Then over the summer, I got a call in August from our principal. She said, “Peggie, we’ve reshuffled. I’ve got an opening for an assistant principal. Will you take it?” This is not how it was supposed to go; I really was not ready. I figured I might be ready the following spring. Yet, I thought, how do I say no to this?

I was also getting tired. I was tired of the drive back and forth, but when I got the assistant principal’s job I thought I would just keep going. There were days in that job when I would shut my door and just cry. I was really a policeman investigating crime all day and doling out punishment. I began to wonder what I was doing there? This was my introduction into administration. I stayed at Moline for three years as the assistant principal before the principal job at Trapp City was advertised. I thought, okay, I could do this. I am now ready. I deal with two thousand kids in an AAA school; I can do an AA principal’s job. I applied and interviewed. When I look back, I wonder if maybe subconsciously I was not very serious about the job. While I did a lot of research before the interview, I did not make face-to-face behind-the-scenes connections. I prepped for the interview, but I did not make time to informally go in and visit with the superintendent or the retiring principal before the actual interview. The man

they hired for the job did. And I know that happens. When I taught at Trapp City before, I was on an interview committee at one point helping the district find a new principal. I know for a fact the guy who was eventually hired had come in prior to the interview and met with the superintendent and took a tour of our facilities.

Principalship denied. *I interviewed for the principal job at Trapp City. I figured I was a decent candidate due to my experiences in school improvement, assessments, and discipline. But I did not get the job, and I was devastated. I was so ready to stop commuting and move back home. I was tired of my family living in two households and us only seeing each other on weekends. Plus, I really did not have any connection to the community of Moline. I did not know anyone. It was just a place I slept. I was pretty upset when I was not chosen for the position. It was not meant to be, and I knew there would be other places I could go.*

Assistant superintendent offered. *Two weeks later I got a call from the superintendent here at Trapp City, and he offered me the job as assistant superintendent of curriculum. I said, "You know I don't have my district licensure certificate. I haven't been a principal. Are you sure you want me for this job?" I think they thought of me as someone who was more geared toward curriculum. When I interviewed for the principal's job, a new high school had just been built. Looking back, I think they wanted me to answer the interview questions more about the logistics of starting school and getting everyone moved in. Instead, I answered questions related to their assessment scores and school improvement. Of course, I said yes to the job offer. I needed to get back home.*

I do not think they advertised the assistant superintendent position. Maybe it was advertised internally, I don't know. I think the superintendent just told the school board he was going to hire me. The assistant superintendent who was leaving is now the superintendent at

Crownpoint. Any smart person would have thought twice about following in her footsteps. She is a mover and a shaker. I knew I could not be her. I was not her. We probably share a lot of the same philosophy, but our leadership styles are totally different.

I really didn't give it a second thought. Instead, I just figured this was what I was meant to do. The job fell out of the sky for whatever reason. Luck? I don't know what it was. Originally, the title I had to take was curriculum director, as I did not have my district licensure. I went back to school again. This time, however, the stress of a new job and going back to school really affected my physical health. I ended up with Mono.

The superintendent, Gary, and I had a great relationship. The first year was a little rocky because he is not much of a talker. I am a communicator. I have to throw this in there because they say it is all about networking. He ended up marrying the gal I had taught English with when I first taught here. It was one of those friendships where we would go a long time without contact, but then whenever we would see each other we would just pick up as good friends. It was a good, solid relationship. Since they were married, I am sure she probably talked to him about me.

Superintendent. *One day last year, he came in and sat down and said, "I'm going to retire. I'm going to propose to the school board I stay on as the director of finance and business, but I'm going to propose they hire you as the superintendent." I said, "You really believe I'm qualified?" He responded, "Absolutely." I believe it was December when he discussed his recommendation with the school board. They did not act on it until either January or February. They did interview me in executive session, and they had several executive session meetings without me. I was adamant they had to be confident in their decision to hire me. I said, "Do not do this unless you believe I am the right person. If you open this job up for interviews, you are*

sending me the signal that you do not believe I am qualified and you are looking for somebody else.” I just asked them to be fair with me and tell me because I would not apply for the job. In my mind, I felt if I were going to take this job, the school board had to be behind me and believe I was the best candidate. If they did not, then they needed to interview other people.

They hired me. I did not even think a whole lot about my gender until after the board committed to hiring me when somebody said, “I can’t believe they hired a woman.” And I thought, yeah, yeah, they did. I would say the average age of our board members is 42. I do have two women on the school board. But here again are the connections. Three board members are former students of mine. And I taught the siblings of another board member.

There has been a learning curve for me. I do not know if this is true for all new superintendents, but there has been a learning curve for me as far as how to work with the school board. I have never had to be accountable to people who have no knowledge of the inside workings of education.

Professional Networks

I attended the quarterly state curriculum directors meetings in Centerville. I had joined the National Council for Staff Development. One of the first things I did in order to get involved was to submit my nomination to be on the state committee to revise the new standards for professional learning. By being on that committee, I met other curriculum directors and eventually joined the Midwest State Staff Development Council. I represented members in the western part of the state. I got on that board and met some great gals.

Just this summer, I wanted to be on the state committee for the development of the new accreditation model. Thankfully, I knew a woman who was very well connected in school improvement circles. I have worked with her in the past, so I got her to write a letter for me. I

am on that committee, and I have made some really good connections. I do not sit around and wait for the opportunities to come.

I found out that all the regional curriculum directors met once a month for lunch. I just asked if I could attend. I talked to Mike who once worked here in Trapp City as an assistant superintendent. So, I went to those meetings with him a few times. Some days are very beneficial, and other days we just commiserate with one another.

I definitely joined MSSSA. That is the heavyweight organization for superintendents. I felt like if I wanted to be a superintendent, I needed to observe and listen to how they approach the job and what they are doing. I also made connections with the school boards association superintendent search consultants. I went to one of their workshops called “So you want to be a Superintendent?” I attended because I thought, “You know what, these are the guys who help school boards hire superintendents.” If I was really interested in being a superintendent, I figured I needed to meet them. And they needed to get to know me. I wanted to pick their brains. I wanted to ask them what I needed to be doing if being a superintendent was something for which I was ready.

Mentoring. *I am involved in a mentoring program for first-year superintendents called the Midwest State Educational Leadership Program. My mentor, Dave, has been a superintendent at several districts. He is old school. He comes around periodically and meets with me. They have veteran superintendents presenting on the budget and the legislature. It is very valuable. I was feeling pretty stressed out the first semester because there was a list of items I needed to get accomplished. But when Dave met with me, he asked me what I was trying to prove. He asked if it was because I was a woman or because I was trying to prove I was*

better. But he told me I could not do it all and do it well. He gave me permission, which I did not need, to pick out two or three things and focus on them.

Informal Networks. *Prior to taking on the superintendency, I did call the superintendent of Lake City. I called her last spring when I knew I was going to take this position. She was about to retire, and I told her I just wanted to pick her brain. I knew she was leaving, and I guess maybe I did call her because she was a female. The former superintendent tried to show me things that he was doing; yet, he really didn't. She and I struck up a nice telephone friendship. Finally, I got to meet her. I have not thought about calling her back, but she did tell me to call her anytime.*

I have three female friends I started teaching with in Moline. All three are now principals. We were all looking for jobs at the same time. During the course of our conversations, if I knew something was open I would call them and tell them they should considering applying.

Community Connections

Before I even got the job as superintendent, I wanted to feel a part of the community. One, it is just my personality to want to belong; two, I had been gone and needed to get to know people. So, I talked to someone about the Chamber of Commerce Board. I was really interested in that organization, and I wanted to know what was going on around town. Plus, I thought my belonging would really benefit our school district. I think there are a lot of perceptions about our school district that are not based on facts. We needed voices out in the community. I got on the Chamber of Commerce Board. After that, I joined Rotary, which is interesting. Rotary is made up of older guys in their 70s. Their wives were once called Rotary Anne's. Back in the day, Rotary was a good-ol'-boys' club.

Recently my husband and I were at a Rotary event, and one of the other wives joked about why we would ever want to join an organization with all those men. I told her they did a lot of great projects for the community and that it was a great international connection. I did not even think of the organization as a bunch of men. I felt like she was just pooh-poohing the whole notion that women belonged to Rotary.

Unsettled Talk

Family. *I was not the normal mom. My son had graduated high school and college when I had been working at Moline. I felt excluded from the Trapp City moms' group. You know, the mothers who form a group based on their children's athletic events. The moms' group was constantly feeding the boys once a week. They would ask me to fix something, but I just was not able to. I always wondered how my son felt about that. We never talked. I do not care what the moms' group thought. I am sure they thought, "She can teach in Trapp City. Why does she drive to Moline?" There were a lot of rumors. It wasn't easy. And it probably wasn't ideal for my son and certainly not for my husband. I am sure for a while he felt like a mother because he had to wash uniforms. But it was the best thing for my son and husband because they had a pretty good relationship. It forced them to have a relationship.*

I suppose there were times in my relationship with my husband that things could have gone either way. We are still learning, and we are still married. At one point, I thought of looking around at superintendent opportunities in small school districts. But I did not think my husband could survive my being gone again. The good part for my career was my husband. I did not have to worry about kids and dinner, which is odd. That must be what it is like for a man who has a wife who will take care of things while he is out doing his job. Today, we are in a

very good place. He will fix dinner or clean up because I get home later than he does, or I will come home in between work and evening activities.

Others believed in me. *Prior to my taking the Trapp City superintendent job, I got a call from two superintendents who were very respected in the state. One was the superintendent at Moline, and the other was the superintendent at Bernard. Both of them called me up and told me I should apply for the Bernard superintendency that was just being advertised. I was like, "What? But it's Bernard. I don't have my doctorate." I asked them why they thought I should apply. They responded, "We just think you need to. They need some good candidates." That was a boost. Okay, if they think I can do this because...but I think that sometimes maybe as women I don't know if there is...maybe it's probably my own, I don't know, my own inferiority complex or whatever. But I always think, oh, I need to have more of this or more of that to be qualified. I guess I find it a little difficult to be able to think I possess those qualities. Experience tells me that I think women are more conscientious about wanting to do a really great job. They want to not just feel like...I don't think it is about me not feeling qualified. I just want to make sure that I go in and do a good job.*

When I go to meetings, I look around. The superintendency is still a man's world. I look at the men around me. They have had a traditional path, and they just come with the confidence that they can do this and are entitled to it. Here is my other issue, and maybe this is a gender issue or my own personal bias, but I have seen a lot of male administrators who have been very ineffective. I do not want to be that person.

Lack of women leaders. *I do not know why there are fewer women in administration. Maybe in smaller communities it goes back to the traditional view that superintendents are men. But by the same token, I would be curious to know how many women actually apply for*

superintendent positions. It would reduce the numbers if they are not out there applying and getting interviewed. I think maybe women do have just a sense that they will get to the assistant superintendent position or curriculum director position and be fine with that. Life would have been very easy if I would have just stayed as the assistant superintendent. But I took the job because I was thinking that we could end up getting a less experienced superintendent or one who had less knowledge. If that happened, then I would end up being the pseudo-superintendent helping another person succeed when I was fully capable of just doing it myself.

It goes back to networking. My former superintendent knew a lot of people, but I would not say he was a part of the good-ol'-boy network. He was very independent, and he was not a coach. So, he was not a part of those networks. I find it is difficult for me. I enjoy sitting down and visiting with some of the superintendents, but they do seem to be kind of cliquish. They are not going to invite me over to join them. I like sports, but it does annoy me that sports are the only thing that can be talked about. I would like to talk about your assessments or about what programs you are doing.

The network does not just encompass men. I recently went to the MSSSA breakfast, and there are some women...I'm not being critical by any stretch, so do not interpret it that way, but I am just saying I know for a fact that certain women are a part of the network. They get awards like Superintendent of the Year. Maybe I have been in the world of English too long, where you analyze text, sub-text, and all kinds of things. But I thought it was very interesting that Judy received the "service" award because whenever you, and this is what they said, whenever you need something done she gets it done. Or, she is always there to volunteer. But that is not to say that men have not won the award. I just found it interesting that the award was framed with those descriptors. Those things are just sort of interesting to me as an observer of humans.

To receive these awards, you have to be highly involved. This past summer I attended the MSSSA summer retreat, and they had some seminars in conjunction with the retreat for new superintendents. I noticed they golfed. I do not golf. And there are, you know, the golf jokes throughout the meeting. Shirley golfs, so she gets to be in the network that way. Unfortunately, that does not interest me. But you can definitely see how old school it is.

Facing obstacles. *Challenges? Hmm, I'm trying to think. You know, there might have been...might have been...well, I guess I try to be very conscious...women are typically...I think the perception is the stereotypical woman is emotional. I guess I am sort of conscious of those things. I do not know that men ever worry about things like that. But I guess I am a little sensitive to those things. And I guess I feel that as a woman I am conscious of other people's perception of me, especially with the school board, and rightly so. Because I do not have the budget or the finance experience, I have to prove myself in other ways. The former superintendent is serving...we are paying him a little bit to be a consultant so that I can learn the budget. I think...again, I do not know if that is because of gender or...hopefully not. Hopefully it is just because he knows the other pieces, and I have never had the experience of working with school finance. But I feel like I really have to maybe compensate a little bit because that is one of my weaknesses.*

I will say that I have experienced some discomfort, perhaps being out of my comfort zone, in leading the school board during meetings. We have a new president of the board, and he is young. He is one of my former students, which is an interesting dynamic. That has been a little challenging because I feel like they are just my students. Yet, they are my employers. I have been walking this tight rope about how much I lead them versus how much I just give them the facts and let them make the decisions. That has been a struggle for me. I do not know if that is

due to gender or just my personality. During my evaluation, they commented that I needed to take more leadership initiative at the meetings. I told him, “That’s not my role. You’re the board president; you lead the meetings.” So, it has led to some interesting dynamics. I did get some affirmation of my feelings from a fellow superintendent who is also new and said he was having the same struggles with his board.

I would say that my road was paved by the slogan “It’s not what you know; it’s who you know.” But, I would also say at some point it is what you know. Sooner or later, what you know or do not know will catch up with you.

Demographic Summary of Superintendents

As a result of the conversations from the women in this study, the narrative data indicate how they have experienced their careers in education leading to the superintendency as told through their richly narrated journeys. Their stories were retold through the framework of settled and unsettled discourse related to their experiences in a male-dominated career field. The focal point of the stories was their journey to the superintendency—the settled discourse. Along those journeys, they discussed the importance of community connections and professional networks. Discussions falling under the realm of unsettled discourse related to experiences of inequality, gender bias, discrimination, or feelings of exclusion.

Women, Career Paths, and Years of Experience (Settled Talk)

The women participating in this study were Caucasian. All of them were married. None of the women entered their education careers knowing they would one day be superintendents. Five of the women had to be willing to move in order to accept her superintendency. Of those five, three were actively seeking a superintendent position, and two of them applied only after

being recruited. The remaining three women were internal to the district where they became superintendents.

Common in previous research about women superintendents is their demography. Table 4 shows the varied career paths of the eight women superintendents. Two of the women went straight from a principalship to a superintendency due to the small size of the district—no assistant superintendent positions existed. Two of the women superintendents bypassed a head principal position but were assistant principals before going straight through to an assistant superintendent role. And one woman progressed directly from teacher to central office position to superintendent. These findings of career paths for women superintendents in Midwest State are very similar to the findings from a study conducted by Kim and Brunner (2009). Their national study from a ten-year data set found the three greatest educational career paths traveled by women were as follows: a) 50% of women went from teacher to principal to central office to superintendent; b) 17% went from teacher to central office to superintendent; and c) 16 % of women went from teacher to principal to superintendent. The findings from this study show these eight women took very similar paths as compared to other women across the nation. The majority (five) of the women in this study went from teacher to principal to central office to superintendent. One woman skipped the principal role altogether and went from teacher to central office to superintendent. And two women skipped the central office role and went from teacher to principal to superintendent. The latter path was more direct for the women who worked in smaller districts where very few ancillary roles are needed. Women who had careers in larger school districts often worked in various roles from the time they were a teacher until the moment they accepted their first superintendent job. Six of the eight women moved to the superintendent position through various roles as a director, associate, or assistant superintendent.

These findings are similar those of Kim and Brunner’s study. They found while men may go straight from secondary principalship to superintendent, more than half the women in their study reported getting to the superintendency through a central office role first.

Table 4

Superintendents: Career Paths

Participant	1st Job	2nd Job	3rd Job	4th Job	5th Job	6th Job	7th Job
Dottie	MS/HS Teacher	HS Teacher	MS/HS Principal	Supt.			
Dorothea	Elem Teacher	MS Teacher	MS Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.	Supt.	
Faye*	Elem Teacher	Assistant Supt	Dir. of Instr.	Dir. of Elem Programs	Dep. Supt.	Area Supt.	Supt.
Katherine	HS Teacher	School Improvement Coordinator	Assoc. Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.		
Gwyneth	MS Teacher	K-8 Principal	Supt./ K-5 Prin.				
Harriett	MS Teacher	MS Principal	MS Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.		
Shirley	MS Teacher	Elem Princ.	MS Teacher	Asst. Supt.	MS Princ.	Asst. Supt.	Supt.
Peggie	HS Teacher	Assistant Principal	Asst. Supt.	Supt.			

*Faye: Eighth Job—State Department Director; Ninth Job—Supt.

Table 5 highlights the years of experience each woman has and her highest educational degree earned. Three women have earned their doctorates; two are working on their doctorates;

and three have obtained their district-level certifications. All of the women save two have spent more years in teaching than in any other jobs they held. One woman spent an equal number of years in teaching as she did as an associate, assistant, or deputy superintendent. One woman has spent the majority of her career as a superintendent. The average years of teaching experience for the women in this study was 12.75 years. The findings show at least these eight women in Midwest State stayed in teaching longer than the national average. The study by Kim and Brunner (2009) found women who went on to become superintendents spent an average of 9.8 years in teaching. The decennial research conducted on the American school superintendent in 2010 found the highest percentage (36%) of women stayed in teaching on average 6-10 years (Kowalski, et al., 2011). The highest percentage of women's years of experience in this research was equal in two categories: three of them taught 6-10 years and three of them taught 11-15 years. Further indicating women in Midwest State stay in teaching longer when compared to national averages is that two of the women in this study had 16-20 years of experience. Research by Kowalski, et al. (2011) found only 14.8% of women in America stayed in the classroom for that length of time.

The findings for average age of superintendents in this study are similar to previous research (Glass, et al., 2000; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Kowalski, et al., 2011). The women who participated in this research were on average 52.6 years old. Kowalski, et al. (2011) found only 21% of women superintendents were below the age of 51, and the average age of women superintendents in Kim and Brunner's (2009) study was 53.1 years old. Finally, four of the women superintendents in this study have 30 or more total years of experience in their career fields; three have more than 20 but less than 30 years of experience; and one has less than 20 years of total education experience.

Table 5

Superintendents: Years of Experience

Participants	Teaching	Assistant Prin./ Principal	District Level Admin	Supt	Total Years in Education	Highest Degree Earned
Dottie	15	5	0	10	30	Working on Doctorate
Dorothea	9	7	5	17	38	Doctorate
Faye	11	4	11	4	30	Doctorate
Katherine	10	5	8	2	25	Doctorate
Gwyneth	16	7	0	1	21	Superintendent Certification
Harriett	10	3	5	1	19	Working on Doctorate
Shirley	12	9	6	6	33	Superintendent Certification
Peggie	19	3	5	1	28	Superintendent Certification

Summary

These eight women are driven, passionate, and connected. This chapter presented the qualitative narrative data of the women's rich journeys to becoming a superintendent in a male-dominated career field. Of course, their stories are as unique as are they. While many talked about the structural constraints limiting them in their careers, others' illuminated the ideological discourse surrounding gender barriers to the superintendency may be waning. None of the women viewed gender as a barrier to their status attainment.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

This chapter includes the discussion, conclusions, and implications of the research gathered from this narrative study of eight women superintendents in Midwest State. The discussion of the findings focuses on themes common across the women's narratives in the settled and unsettled discursive realms. Conclusions in this chapter are made regarding the inequality of social capital in these eight women's social networks. Implications from the findings are made for women superintendents, assistant superintendents who aspire to the superintendency, state superintendents organization leaders, and superintendent search consultants.

This research lends support to previous studies about whether gender is significant to one accessing and using social capital resources for job attainment and sustainment (Granovetter, 1995; Lin, 2001b; Lin, et al., 1981). Using a narrative approach, I sought to reveal how women superintendents in Midwest State made meaning of their roles in a male dominated career field. To achieve this goal, I collected data, created experience-centered narratives (Squire, 2008) focused on the women's journey to the superintendency, and analyzed their narratives to develop commonalities and themes.

Discussion of Findings

The overarching question guiding the research was "What role does social capital play in women attaining the superintendency?" Through the development of the research questions in Chapter 1, I sought to understand a) how these women describe their formal and informal social networks at various levels; b) the women's perceptions on whether or not they believed their network ties helped them attain their superintendency; and c) and how women use their own

social capital to advance the careers of other women in the state. There is no doubt that without their human capital the women could not have achieved the superintendency. However, each woman's story illuminated the significant role her relationships and professional connections were to her career success.

Formal and Informal Social Structures

Social structures or networks whether formal or informal are a significant resource for career advancement (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Granovetter, 1995; Hudson, 1991; Ibarra, 1993; Lin, 1999b, 2001a; Tallerico, 2000a). Scholars have slightly varying definitions of formal and informal social networks. Combs (2003) perceived informal social networks as those contacts and relationships which bridge access to career opportunities and social support. Ibarra (1993) described informal networks as discretionary and involving relationships from work, social arenas, or a combination of both. Whereas other scholars (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Shakeshaft, et al., 2007) used the overarching term *networking* to describe informal relationships and the term *mentoring* to describe more formal relationships. Combs and Ibarra referred to formal networks as a more prescribed structure in which the group is gathered for the purpose of accomplishing organizational tasks, goals, and objectives.

The women in this study had very similar formal structures. All of the women belonged to the Midwest State School Superintendent Association (MSSSA). This network was described as the "heavyweight organization," "The Network," and "the superintendents' club." It was the most influential formal educational network to which the women belonged. Other educational networks the women belonged to varied depending on their location or whether or not they were dual-hatted as a superintendent and principal. Those who also served in principal roles belonged to elementary or high school administrative organizations similar in nature to the state

superintendents association. Like MSSSA, the Council of Superintendents and the multi-state superintendents group is a network for superintendents. Not all of the women belonged to the multi-state group as its membership is based on location. Most of the women attended the Council of Superintendents meetings.

Formal community organizations the women joined were also very similar. The women collectively joined community organizations for three main reasons: a) to give back to the community; b) it was a requirement of their position as the superintendent; and c) they felt it was necessary to be visible in the community. The common community organizations were Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce, Recreation Commission, and United Way. Other organizations ranged from local arts councils to economic development councils.

The informal networks for each woman varied based on factors such as the tasks each woman was trying to accomplish in her school district, the number of years she had been serving in a particular community, or the number of years she had been connected to administration in the state. Many informal connections were established through formal networks or through connections to others' networks. Some of the most influential informal connections the women made were with individuals hired as consultants on superintendent search committees.

Dottie described connecting informally in the community through her father and sons' connections. The informal connections she made through her father were during coffee talk at the local café. Other connections she had were with church and golf groups due to her sons serving on those boards. However, the majority of the women's informal connections came through relationships they built by attending conferences, by serving on state committees, and by being involved in superintendent organizations. Two of the women briefly mentioned building

relationships after work over a beer. The women mentioned very little about informal social networks existing outside the scope of their jobs.

Network Ties and Status Attainment

Six of the eight women are in their first superintendent job. Of those six, four of them have two years or less in the superintendency; one has six years; and one has ten years. The remaining two women are in their second superintendency, but their first superintendency in this state. Both Faye and Dorothea were hired out of state for their initial superintendent experience.

In the case of Faye and Dorothea's initial out-of-state superintendency, they mentioned only human capital assisting them toward being offered their positions. Faye mentioned taking a job out of state on a whim. Dorothea, on the other hand, made a strategic move in order to get a superintendent job. She went through a formal job process of applying and interviewing before being offered the job. However, when they both sought superintendent positions in Midwest State, network relationships were significant to their job attainment. In fact, all eight women had some element of informal or formal social network ties play a role in their attainment of the superintendency.

Interesting, however, is the responses I received from some of the women when I asked why she felt the school board hired her over the other candidates who were interviewed. A few responded with laughter and said they did not know why she was selected, or she explained it as just luck. Some women stated they believed they had the credentials and the experience the school board sought in their next superintendent. One of the superintendents stated she was a good fit because the school board was looking for someone who could build relationships. Then, she followed up by stating she was not really known for building relationships.

While the women often stated connections and relationships were key to their success, it was almost as if they were just recognizing this during the course of our conversation. None of the women acknowledged being well known by the board of education as being relative to her being offered the job. None of the women indicated their connections with search consultants might have played a role in her being offered the job. None of the women indicated having a connection to the previous superintendent as being the reason she was offered the job. While in some cases the women in this study did seek out a particular superintendency in Midwest State, they seemed unaware of any possibility their network contacts may have aided them by dropping their name into the ring (Moody, 1983). Yet, the women in this study were very aware of the importance of networking. They purposefully sought out key people or key organizations in the state in order to benefit from those connections. The superintendents and the search committees who sponsored, consulted, and spoke on behalf of these women are people who are respected in the state and are perceived as having the credentials to identify worthy superintendent candidates (Moody, 1983).

Three of the women superintendents were internal hires, meaning they already worked in the district where they became superintendents. They, too, mentioned nothing about sponsored mobility with respect to connections. Further interesting is all three of the women who were internal hires were reluctant to take the position, often more than once, when recruited by the board of education or the departing superintendent. Although they seemed to not recognize it, sponsored mobility was key to their attaining the superintendency. While the American culture values the notion of success stemming from hard work and one's ability to manifest her own destiny, these notions are not reality. What is significant, and often ignored, in obtaining or advancing in employment is how much connections and sponsorship matter (Tallerico, 2000a).

Receiving support or sponsorship from others was a common theme in each woman's story. Perhaps without their direct knowledge, others were preparing the way for them to become superintendents. Many of the superintendents commented on the importance of their connections. Furthermore, the ongoing support was key to their overall success. Not surprisingly, due to the nature of the gender inequity in the superintendency in Midwest State, the women's support and mentorship came from men. Dottie's connection to the commissioner of education helped her achieve her administrative degree in one summer. Peggie's connection to a superintendent who once worked with her father helped her find a job in a new city. Shirley's weak tie resource called and recruited her to apply to the superintendency she now holds. Dorothea, Katherine, and Gwyneth all discussed how their male bosses encouraged them to get their administrative or doctoral degrees, which eventually led them to their current position as superintendents.

Social Capital to Advance Other Women

The women in this study spoke very little about how they sponsor or use their own social capital to advance the careers of other women. A few experiences were shared. Faye took the time to reach out to women who were new to the superintendency. She felt that she was not welcomed with open arms, so she made a concerted effort to support new women superintendents. Katherine used her social capital to call another district and speak on behalf of a woman administrator who worked in her central office. The woman she called about did become a superintendent the following year. But, Katherine was also quick to point out she assists both men and women who exhibit leadership potential. When Peggie and her friends were all looking for administrative jobs, they would call each other and share information about administrative openings.

Some of the women superintendents received mentoring by other women in the state. Faye was invited by another woman superintendent to attend the AASA Women's Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. But that was 18 years ago in 1996. None of the women in this study described any mentoring initiatives taking place today. When Katherine was at Hayden, she had a woman at the central office inform her about possible jobs coming open at the district level.

A new state level organization is providing formal mentorship to men and women new to the superintendency. Both Gwyneth and Peggie were involved in this mentoring program. Gwyneth did not see the need for a mentoring program dedicated just to women, but believed a quality mentoring program was needed for all new superintendents. Peggie received little information from the superintendent she replaced, but this prompted her to reach out and call a retiring female superintendent for support. A great telephone friendship ensued.

Unsettled Talk

My goal of putting women at the intersection of social capital and the superintendency was to add new resources of research on both women and social capital theory. The aim of this feminist work was to bracket the social construction of gender within the theory of social capital (Lather, 1992). While I only chose to only capture women's experiences for this study, I remained aware there is no universal woman's truth (Harding, 1987). While common themes emerged from the retelling of the women's stories, each woman's lived experience is uniquely hers.

I chose a feminist poststructural paradigm to frame the research on women and social capital as an antithesis to previously established positivist paradigms. The poststructural nature of this work aimed to look critically at language and discourse in the superintendents' narratives

in order to better understand the social and institutional context of women superintendents (Grogan, 1996; Weedon, 1997). The unsettled discourse of the women brings to light their perceptions of education, experience, leadership styles, and why they believed there are not more women superintendents in Midwest State.

Education and experience. Some school district vacancy advertisements for superintendent positions will often state, “doctorate preferred.” More often than not, this is the case in larger school districts. Three of the eight women in this study had earned their doctorates and were leading in urban and suburban large school districts. However, the majority of the women in this study had attained superintendent jobs without an earned doctorate. Albeit, they were leading in smaller sized school districts with student populations between 300-2500. Katherine, a superintendent of a larger district, stated, “I always felt since I was a female I needed the doctor in front of my name to accomplish what I wanted to.” A nationwide survey of superintendents in 2010 found 45% of them had earned a doctoral degree (Kowalski, et al., 2011). Grogan (1996) stated surveys, like the one mentioned above, “contribute significantly to the dominant professional discourse on educational administration” (p. 50). According to Baker, Orr, and Young (2007) there has been a 48% increase in doctoral degrees awarded during the 10-year period from 1993-2003.

As Peggie told the story of obtaining her building administrative degree, she described herself as “selling out” and taking the “fast track” because she attended a college whose program deviated from the norm. Due to the structural constraints of the family, quality alternative pathways for entrance into educational administration may be beneficial to both men and women. However, programs like Peggie’s tend to attract women and minorities, not the dominant white-

male group. Consequently, these alternative programs ill prepare them to be administrators. This in turn perpetuates the perception that women and minorities are not qualified to lead.

Neither Peggie nor Shirley has attained a doctoral degree. So when individuals of influence were recruiting them to apply to larger schools, both were quick to state they could not apply because they lacked a doctorate. Peggie felt the invitation was a boost to her self-confidence, but she did not apply. Shirley applied and is now the superintendent. While women often think they need a doctorate in order to level the playing field in a male-dominated environment, Shirley proved the game could be played by different rules.

For some women, more important than the perceived required credentials is the need to have an adequate amount of experience before applying for administrative positions. Five of the eight superintendents who participated in this study described experiences of turning down opportunities for career advancement. Many of these women expressed a great desire to remain in the classroom close to kids; they were not driven to be administrators and were definitely reluctant to make the leap. However, while experience is no doubt a benefit, the women have no less experience than do their male counterparts who move up faster and earlier. Two-thirds of male administrators have less than ten years of teaching experience, while a little less than half of the women surveyed in a national study had ten years or less teaching experience (Kowalski, et al., 2011). Dottie felt she had not been a principal as long as “other” principals. Dottie stated, “I’m not going to do this. It’s just too fast for me.” Faye believed she could not move up too quickly because she was a woman. She felt she did not have enough experience. These women indicated they have to work harder and longer in order to compete with their male peers. Peggie stated men “have a traditional path” to the superintendency. By traditional, she means normal. A traditional or normal path is perceived as better or of higher quality. Because there are more

men in the superintendency position, their path has become the template for which others falsely believe they should follow (Brunner & Kim, 2010).

Faye believed the window of opportunity for women to become superintendents is limited. She feels a woman cannot enter into the position too young because she will lack the needed experience, yet if she waits too long her career tenure in the position will be short-lived. Youth is seen as a disadvantage in women, but not in men. Gwyneth declined the first opportunity she was given to be the superintendent in the district where she was a principal. Peggie had completed her administrative degree but was not ready to get an administrative job. And while Dorothea is often the outlier in this study, even she admitted seeking an assistant principal position over a head principal position because she did not feel prepared. While many of the women in this study put family before career, their families were not the issue for declining an opportunity to advance in these cases. When women have the same educational preparation and experience as their male peers but choose to wait longer to advance in their careers, their actions and beliefs reify the dominant discourse that men by virtue of their gender have the skills needed to do the job at any age (Grogan, 1996). These examples legitimize the perception that women must work harder and wait their turn. Some of the women in this study also talked about ineffective male leaders with whom they had worked. As more women enter into superintendency positions in Midwest State, their path to the superintendency will become the norm. Perhaps the template for success regarding the path to the superintendency is exactly the path women follow. Brunner and Kim (2010) asserted the time gap between how long men and women spend in the classroom and in district curriculum instruction roles could now be an asset to those wanting to lead as superintendents. I would concur with this due to the changing

nature of an educational administrator from one who manages people and programs to one who is the instructional leader for the district. Normal could be redefined.

Leadership style. Shirley identified herself as “pretty bold” and was known as a “hatchet man.” Her leadership style was to be very direct and tough. She considered herself to have an aggressive leadership style and made note of having to experience being called a bitch. From this we see how language and gender shape our beliefs. Aggressive male administrators are natural leaders, while aggressive female administrators are bold, tough bitches. Shirley is proud of her leadership style and feels it is effective to her running a quality school district. She is not afraid to fire individuals in key leadership positions who are incompetent. While she justified her leadership style due to the position she holds in the district, the positive attitude and position she takes toward being labeled aggressive showed her willingness to disrupt the hegemonic discourse (Grogan, 1996).

Where are the women? I found the hyphenated label of women administrator often put the women in this study in conflict with their own experiences (Harding, 1987). Peggie struggled with the choices she made between being a “normal” mom and choosing to be an administrator. Dorothea perceived she had never been treated differently as a woman. She stated, “I do not think of myself as a female superintendent. I think of myself as a superintendent.” Yet, she took notice of the absence of women in her career field. Her response to the lack of women administrators was simply “It is what it is.” Having very few women in educational leadership positions is normative, even for the women in this study. I found the women did not question why there were so few women but rather accepted their absence as status quo. Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) asserted, “women superintendents who want to succeed stay silent about systemic problems of inequality” (p. 45). Individually these women stand up for themselves if

and when they encounter inequality. As a collective unit, however, they have accepted their position as the minority.

In the course of my conversations with the superintendents, I sought their perceptions as to why they believed more women were not superintendents in Midwest State. Each superintendent described reasons that are very similar to the barriers described in previous research (Bell & Chase, 1993; Brunner, 2008; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989). Their initial response was to admit they did not know why there were so few women superintendents. But after giving it thought, they listed typical gender barriers. Dorothea stated women are not mobile due to the structural constraints of her family. Dottie felt women get caught up in their own stereotypes and want summers off with their children. She did blame women for not encouraging other women. Several superintendents believed stress was a factor. While a few others thought perhaps boards of education held on to the traditional perception that men are meant to lead. One superintendent was curious as to how many women actually applied for superintendent positions, hinting women may be to blame. The women superintendents have internalized the stereotypical gender roles and the dominant discourse continues to give them legitimacy (Skrla, 2003). Throughout the course of my research, I have sensed an underlying feeling that these women believe they are not supposed to be in these roles.

Gender barriers and discrimination. Because the focus of my study was not on gender barriers, I did not specifically ask the women about barriers they perceived they encountered in their careers. However, their richly descriptive stories shed light on how women are still encountering the same barriers and discrimination as has been noted in previous studies (Brunner, 2008; Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989, 1998, 1999; Tallerico, 2000a). In order to add to the

body of research on women and educational leadership, I briefly address this topic. I did, however, specifically ask if they had ever experienced discrimination as women superintendents.

Family. All of the women in this study are married, and all but one raised children. Dottie was initially reluctant to enter into administration with three children, but in the end she did not feel she missed out on any of their activities due to the demands of her job. Because of her job, she was in fact in attendance at their events. Dottie leads in a very small school and stated her children would often show up in her office with their friends. Her role as superintendent did not hinder her time with her children. As found in previous studies (Eagly & Carli, 2007), four of the women stayed home to raise their children. They returned to work once their children enrolled in primary school. Shakeshaft (1998) noted family and home responsibilities were barriers for women in the 1980s. Those barriers were a) delaying the superintendency until children were older, b) having a spouse with a more flexible job, or c) having a commuter marriage. By 2002, an AASA study surveying women superintendents found the large majority of them were no longer making the concessions Shakeshaft cited. Similarly, the superintendents in this study did not let culturally driven gender barriers become showstoppers for them. However, the participants did have to make concessions in order to have both family and career. Harriett waited until her sons were grown before she applied for superintendent positions. Peggie's husband maintained the household and provided for their son while she worked away from home as a teacher and assistant principal. By the time she chose to go into a superintendent position, her children were grown. At one point she considered looking for a superintendency much earlier in her career, but she knew she would have to move and did not feel her husband could weather her absence a second time. Faye chose to have a commuter marriage and lived apart from her husband for seven years. In the end, five of the eight women

were able to be mobile for their careers but it happened at the same time their husbands were close to retirement or near the end of their own careers. Three of the women stated they would not leave the area for another superintendency position as their husband's jobs were tied to specific locations.

Discrimination. Discrimination in the workplace occurs overtly and covertly. Sexual harassment and off-colored jokes may be overt in nature. Difference between men and women in career advancement and pay are often less obvious. When I asked the women superintendents to share any experiences they encountered related to discrimination, they reported experiencing very little, if any discrimination. They stated they did not encounter “resistance,” or they never felt “restricted,” or they did not feel “excluded” as women superintendents. Shirley and Katherine were the only women who stated they had not experienced “discrimination” and used the actual term. This supports Chase's (1995) statement that “talk about inequality generally belongs to an unsettled, explicitly ideological discursive realm” (p. 17). They were not comfortable seeing themselves as women who experienced discrimination.

Unfortunately, in spite of their claims to the contrary, their stories did cast light on experiences they encountered which were discriminatory against them as women. Persuasive evidence has shown discrimination exists (Eagly & Carli, 2007). One superintendent gave examples of gender bias existing in her organization, but she never used the term discrimination. Katherine was not selected by the board of education when she applied for her first principalship. They chose to hire a man instead, even when the superintendent recommended her for the job. She had heard later their response to his endorsement of her was “Didn't we have any guys apply?”

Harriett also did not feel she had encountered any discrimination in her first superintendency, but she did encounter it as an assistant superintendent. When applying for the assistant superintendent position at Vail Valley, the board president made it clear to her women were not meant to lead but were expected to be in positions subordinate to men. Shirley stated she had not purposefully been discriminated against, but rather was underestimated as a woman. Yet, she described one instance where she flatly turned down a job at the central office when her pay was noticeably less than a male central office employee's pay. She also told about the negative and derogatory remarks made to her by an older male in the community. Like Shirley, Dottie also turned down an administrative job when she felt the pay being offered was less than it should be for her position. Dottie experienced another form of discrimination as a token female when she served on the state athletic association board. She had always felt excluded from the athletic association's social network but truly recognized how much of a "clique" the group was when they asked her to serve on the board because they needed female representation. She was accepted into their network as a quota, not because of the value she added to the organization.

Finally, when Peggie discussed the challenges she faced as a woman superintendent, she struggled with completing an entire thought as she processed through the question. She eventually stated she was conscious about women stereotypes and wondered if perhaps she was experiencing it when the board of education chose to keep on the previous male superintendent as a finance consultant to the district. In the end, she decided it was merely because she lacked the experience and human capital in budget and finance, not because she was a woman.

While the women have experienced some form of discrimination over the course of their careers, they perceive they experienced very minimal if almost no discrimination as current

sitting superintendents. To become an object of discrimination is unnatural for successful women. It is unsettling.

Conclusions

In this section, the findings of the study are examined through the theoretical lens of social capital and the previous research reflected in the review of literature in Chapter 2. In the last thirty years, the concept of social capital has been given much theoretical attention, and its theoretical underpinnings have shifted overtime. Early research in the 1980s by Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986) considered social capital from a class-based perspective. However, the standpoint of social capital for this research was viewed from a gender-based perspective (Lin, 2001b). I used the theory to examine the resources embedded in these eight women's social networks and whether or not they accessed those resources for a beneficial purpose.

Lin (2000) stated not all individuals equally capture or equally receive expected returns from their social capital. Previous studies using a gender-aware approach to social capital have concluded women are disadvantaged in their networks (Ibarra, 1992; Lin, 2000; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982, 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Conversely, the majority of the women in this study are not experiencing a network disadvantage due to gender. By using Lin's (2001b) theory of social structure and action, I discuss the findings in relation to the following three elements: a) the resources imbedded in these women's social structures; b) the accessibility of those resources by them; and c) and how they used their captured resources purposefully. Further discussion considers whether the women in this study experienced *capital deficit* (cannot acquire the resources imbedded in their social networks) and/or *return deficit* (receive different outcomes than expected) and whether those play a role in limiting women from becoming superintendents in Midwest State.

High Status Resources are Critical

Social capital resources affect an individual's instrumental action outcomes. Higher status resources such as superintendents, board presidents, and vacancy search consultants foster an individual's well being, facilitate the flow of information, and increase an individual's credibility (Lin, 2001b). As indicated in the discussion of the findings, the women's social structures are for the most part very richly supplied. Their formal social structures are robust not only in the educational arena but also in the community. By being involved in both community and educational networks, they have access to diverse resources for varying purposes. While they had many informal connections, only one superintendent hinted about informally socializing for purposive action. In previous research, participants perceived socializing as being minimally related to career success but engaging in professional activities was positively linked to career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). The women superintendents in this study also had little to say about the importance of their informal networks but expressed a great deal about their professional activities and organizations.

Resources in relation to social capital are those accessible through social connections (Lin, 2001a). They are the other individuals in a person's social network with whom they can connect either directly or indirectly. The resources in these women's networks were informative, credible, and influential. Their resources run the gamut from local librarian to the state commissioner of education. However, most influential for these eight women were other superintendents, school board members, and consultants from vacancy search firms.

Superintendents. Superintendents were a rich and direct resource for many of the women in this study. Dorothea set out to capture information from the superintendent of the district in which she was planning to apply. The information received from her resource gave

her a view of the district and provided her with information to which other applicants were not privy. By virtue of his position he was a credible resource, and if he supported her in applying his credibility was transferred to her. Additionally, he could possibly have had some influence with the school board in not only determining whether she was granted an interview but also whether or not she would be a quality superintendent. When a credible individual puts in a good word for another person, that good word can carry a lot of weight toward the decision making process. Faye's connection with her previous superintendent, John, paid dividends when she came home from working out of state. He reached out to her and asked if she wanted to return to Hayden as his next deputy superintendent. And Sean, the superintendent who had departed Centerville, used his influence to get other individuals to reach out to Faye, who then convinced her to apply for her current superintendency. Finally, Peggie is in her current superintendent position because the departing superintendent proposed to the board she be his successor.

School board members. School boards are one of the gatekeepers to the superintendency. A superintendent's reputation and longevity in the superintendency is often determined by others' perceptions of her credibility (G. J. Petersen & Short, 2001). When school board presidents reach out to an administrator and invite her to the superintendency, their request by virtue of board president's position carries much capital. Only three of the eight women superintendents were internal hires resonating with previous studies that the majority of superintendents are hired from outside the district (Glass, 1992). This study confirmed school board presidents do wield influence when it comes to recruiting internally. The power of school boards is further revealed through Katherine's story when the school board trumped her previous superintendent's recommendation and chose not to hire her.

Dottie was recruited by her board president on two different occasions. The first time he approached her, she turned down his offer. The second opportunity took some convincing but eventually she accepted the superintendency. Interestingly enough, one of her connections was a superintendent in another state and advised her to just go for it and not look back. Gwyneth, too, was asked twice by her school board to take the superintendency position in her district. When school boards choose from among their own, it reinforces trust. The women superintendents who were internally hired had proven themselves trustworthy, reliable, and capable of leading a school district.

Search firm consultants. The best social capital resources are superintendent search firm consultants. Another avenue to the superintendency is through superintendent search consulting firms. Very often, school boards of education will hire these firms to advertise and conduct the search for their next district superintendent. While boards will conduct the interviews of candidates and choose from among them, the search firms recruit candidates, screen applicants, and provide a pool of interview candidates to the school board. Because a number of applicants will have no access to the school board, vacancy search consultants can be considered gatekeepers to the superintendency. Search consultants are excellent social capital, as they facilitate the flow of information about potential vacancies. Furthermore, the normative assumption regarding a consultant's expertise gives those whom they sponsor increased credibility.

School boards are increasing their reliance on outside consultants to conduct their superintendent searches (Tallerico, 2000a). Awareness of these practices led four of the women superintendents in this study to invest in the social capital of search consultants. Dorothea, Katherine, and Harriett purposely sought out consultants in order to gain information about

potential vacancies, or glean information about specific districts in which they were interested in applying. Shirley was sought by a consultant whom she knew through other networks. Search consultants for these women were weak tie contacts. They spent less time developing strong relationships with the consultants. The consultants are less interconnected to the women's other networks. The women superintendents sought the consultants out for a purposive action. And the consultants were a rich resource of new information (Granovetter, 1973; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982; Smith-Lovin, 2007). The search consultants do not do the hiring, they can only get the women as far as the interview process. Undoubtedly, these women were chosen for the human capital they brought to the organization. Being vetted through the consultants gave them credibility and legitimacy, whether they needed it or not.

Weak ties are better. The best source of social capital for women in education was a network made up of weak tie resources (Granovetter, 1973, 1995; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982; Smith-Lovin, 2007). A weak tie network is comprised of an individual's coworkers, acquaintances, and friends. Conversely, strong ties are those people in an individual's direct network such as family members and close friends. These women's networks were beneficial because they were comprised of diverse, weak ties that included men.

The resources imbedded in these eight women's networks facilitated the flow of information, influenced others in position of power, increased their credibility, and reinforced their identity and recognition (Lin, 1999a). Resources that were most beneficial to the women in this study turned out to be men. Similar to other research, men were better sources of job related information (Huffman & Torres, 2002).

Access and Action

Some women superintendents do have access to social capital resources and do know how to use those resources for purposive action. Social capital is ingrained in the relationships of social networks. It is regarded as the resources imbedded in social structures that are accessed purposively (Lin, 2001b). While the women's social networks are resource rich, their networks have no value if they cannot access and use the resources contained within them. For the most part, these women have no problem accessing the resources imbedded in their social networks. Dissimilar to previous studies regarding social capital and gender, the majority of the women in this study are not barred from social capital access and, therefore, are not experiencing inequality (Lin, 2000; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1982; Portes, 2000).

In fact, these women are the exception. Because as women they are considered a disadvantaged group, their having social networks comprised of both men and women will result in better outcomes for them. Previous research about cross-group ties for disadvantaged groups has been found to be the exception rather than the rule (Lin, 1999a). By connecting with the dominant gender group, these women have overcome the structural constraints found in most women's networks.

The following section highlights each participant's access to social capital resources and the results of those actions. I found the following superintendents have access to the resources in their networks: Dorothea, Katherine, Harriett, and Shirley. Faye and Dottie have access to their resources but to a lesser extent. I found Peggie experienced *return deficit* and Gwyneth experienced both *capital* and *return deficit*.

Access to abundant social capital. Dorothea has access to bountiful resources in both her formal and informal networks. Because she started her first superintendency in an area

where she was unknown, she knew immediately she needed to get involved in organizations and volunteer in order to build relationships and become a known entity in the community (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). This action led her to becoming the first female president in Rotary where she lived in Massachusetts; unfortunately, she moved before taking the position. Also while living in Massachusetts, she made the effort to reach out to the superintendent in Springfield, who later went to work for the College Board. She knew accessing his social capital would build her credibility in the community. Dorothea served on a lot of professional organizations. But she was not using board service to advance her career, she believed in what these organizations are about and in their service to the community. When Dorothea joined the state superintendents association, she did not hesitate to introduce herself to the president and inquire as to how she could be more involved. These actions have led her to serve in many capacities in many organizations. After 12 years, her social capital has increased greatly, and she is now considered one of the more powerful players in superintendent circles.

Katherine is the superintendent of a AAA school district in Midwest State. She is in her first superintendency and wasted no time making the right connections in order to get the right job. The year before she knew she would start applying, she built relationships with the gatekeepers for superintendent positions—the search committee consultants. Her superintendent advised her to call and talk with them. While she may have had many good resources, she used the best resource to increase her instrumental return. Once Katherine set her mind to pursuing a superintendency, she became more involved in community and professional organizations. Katherine had a substantial advantage in the job attainment process because she had access to and used greater social resources (Lin, et al., 1981). Prior to her goal of becoming a superintendent, she perceived no benefit in networking professionally or socially. Furthermore,

Katherine knew how to access and use social capital resources to her benefit. She stated she would not hesitate to approach individuals who might not want to help her. If she knew they had something to offer her, she would seek out their expertise.

Harriett, like Katherine, had no issue with using the best social capital resources to achieve the best instrumental return. As soon as she knew she was ready to make the jump into a superintendency, she capitalized on the social capital rooted in superintendent search committees. She had access to consultants at conferences and trainings and took advantage of those resources to advance her career. Harriett also mobilized her resources when she borrowed social capital from her previous boss at Wake Center in order to use him as a reference (Flap, 2004). He had previously worked at the location where she was applying so she figured her connection to him would motivate the board to at least consider her application. Harriett was the only one of the eight women in the study who mentioned building social capital when socializing over drinks. She realized the superintendents association is a very influential organization, and she realized by borrowing the social capital of powerful individuals her social capital would also increase substantially.

Shirley, like Dorothea, had been established as a superintendent in the state longer than Harriett and Katherine. Neither Shirley nor Dorothea is in the social capital building phase. Similar to Dorothea, Shirley is one of the key holders of social capital. Instead of reaching up to superintendent search committees to find her first superintendency, they reached down to her. That connection led to her current superintendent job. This is one more example refuting the existence of inequality in social capital for women administrators in Midwest State. Her gender played no role in the quality of the job lead she received via informal channels (Huffman & Torres, 2002). Shirley indicated she got involved in professional organizations early on as a

“worker bee,” meaning hard work pays off. That is true; hard work does pay off. Commitment and hard work get a person noticed and trusted within the organizational network. Shirley’s hard work increased her social capital, and she was eventually elected president of the state superintendents organization.

Faye definitely has access to social capital, and I have no doubt she could use her resources for purposive action when necessary. Over the course of her career, she has mobilized her connections for instrumental returns. However, at this point in her career, she was not very involved in professional organizations. My perception of Faye’s networking is that she is not particularly interested nor sees a need in making herself visible. She is quite involved in legislative affairs, however. An aspect of her job she described as undesirable. Faye admits being more comfortable when she worked in the curriculum instruction arena, and sees her current job to involve more “schmoozing.” I also perceived the relationships she had built through her social connections to be the most genuine among the participants in this study. She was well connected and involved in community organizations, but again she saw that as necessary to sustaining her position. She was involved because it was important to the community. She was fully aware of the power players in the state; yet, she was comfortable being in philosophical disagreement with them. She perceived some of them as trying to be “splashy and political.” She was more in tune with the fact that her social capital needed to be invested with her board of education. While external social networks were key to occupational mobility for these women, their internal networks were also critical to sustaining a job and maintaining resources (Lin, 2001b).

A great deal of Dottie’s social capital resources came from relationships and networks she had built in her community. This was not surprising since she was a superintendent in the

same location where she grew up and where her family had farmed for generations. She drank coffee with the folks around town; she golfed and attended church with them; and she had lunch at the senior center. Her social capital was an example of maintaining resources to promote *expressive* action rather than *instrumental* action (Lin, 2001b). Through maintaining these resources, she acquired recognition and legitimacy in her community. Those are important qualities in any superintendent, but they very valued in a small town. More importantly it meant she was similar to them and shared their same values and lifestyles. While these homophilous interactions took less effort, Dottie worked hard to connect with the larger educational community. Furthermore, she was far removed geographically from the central hub of educational flurry. She had traversed the state numerous times accumulating many road hours in order to maintain her visibility and increase her social capital in professional organizations. While Dottie worked hared to be well connected in the state, she perceived herself to be “excluded a little bit because the larger schools dominate the smaller schools.” In this respect, she had experienced *capital deficit*. Lin (2000) stated, “Any given social group reflects degrees of group demarcation and variation of network resources among members” (p. 787). As viewed through Dottie’s lens, the resources in the state superintendents organization are possibly bifurcated.

Return deficit. Peggie had access to social capital resources and had mobilized them for purposive actions prior to her superintendency. When looking for a job outside of Trapp City, she called upon one of her father’s connections. That connection gave her the instrumental return she was expecting—a job at Moline. However, while Peggie was new to the superintendency, she did not perceive the superintendents association as adding value to her social networks. She viewed the association as a “heavyweight, old school” organization where

men mostly talk about sports and golf. Peggie did not lack access to the resources in this organization. However, her perception was that she did not receive an equal return of social capital resources from the same social networks as others, even women. For Peggie, *return deficit* was at play. For instance, Peggie stated, “Shirley golfs so she gets to be in the network that way.” Another area that Peggie may be experiencing *return deficit* was through her previous social networks associated with curriculum directors. Women make up the majority of the state curriculum directors network. Because Peggie was new to the superintendency, her previous social networks may still be the ones she values and mobilizes. If so, these would not be the best social ties in which to make connections and build social capital among her superintendent peers (Lin, 2000). Through the curriculum directors’ network, she made connections and joined the state staff development council, also comprised of mostly women members. When discussing these two networks, she stated she had “met a great bunch of gals.” Similar to other research, women predominantly hold membership in the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development more so than do men (Kowalski, et al., 2011). If Peggie wanted to gain more social capital among her superintendent peers, she was currently operating in a network where she would experience *return deficit*.

Capital and return deficit. Gwyneth, like Dottie, was remotely located in the far western area of the state. She, too, had to work harder to get involved in statewide professional organizations. Gwyneth experienced social capital inequality due to *capital deficit* and *return deficit*. This could be because she was new to the superintendency, because she was in a remote region of the state, or a combination of the two. A large resource in the state was superintendent search consultants. Gwyneth did not have access to the resources imbedded in the networks of search consultants. Perhaps, she did not see herself as being mobile in her job due to her

husband's career and did not need those resources. Like Dottie, her networks were more about maintaining her current position rather than gaining a new one. Additionally, Gwyneth mentioned very little about the state superintendents association. In her defense, she was in the first year of her superintendency and did live very far from where most of the educational activity in the state occurred. Gwyneth lacked access to the rich resources imbedded in her potential social networks. Additionally, Gwyneth received unequal returns from social capital resources compared to some of the other participants in this study. Similar to Peggie, she was not mobilizing the best resources. Her current networks were located regionally and comprised of principals, not superintendents. Because she served a dual role as elementary principal and superintendent, she held onto the networks that were comfortable and familiar.

There were many variances among the women regarding the resources imbedded in their social structures, the opportunities they had to access their resources, and the actions they took to use those resources for their benefit. Dorothea, Harriett, Katherine, and Shirley were all fully cognizant of the information and influence imbedded in their resources. These women were not disadvantaged due to gender. They were not disadvantaged at all when it came to social capital. Dottie and Faye were aware of the social capital advantages in their professional organizations, but both had relied more on the resources internal to their community and school district. Peggie had access to the resources in her networks, but she had not begun to mobilize them for purposive action. And Gwyneth seemed to have very little access to superintendent networks. Consequently, at the time of this writing, it is perhaps not surprising that Gwyneth is the only participant in the study who did not remain in the superintendency.

Geographical location of the superintendency matters. Superintendents who were in rural, western areas of the state had less immediate access to social capital in superintendent

networks. There is scant research discussing the affects of the geographic location of an individual in relation to her network, but it appears when it comes to educational administration in this state location does matter. Naturally, the women have more opportunity to build relationships with those who were closer to them than those who are further away, and it takes less energy to do so (McPherson, et al., 2001). Peggie, Gwyneth, and Dottie worked further away from the state school board association, the department of education, and the capitol—all located in Centerville. While the state superintendents association does change its meeting location from time to time, it does not venture far from Centerville. Therefore, Peggie, Gwyneth, and Dottie had to work extremely hard to develop social capital with their peers. Couple the extra drive time with a new superintendency, and relationship development probably took a back seat.

Implications

This study contributes to existing literature regarding gender and social capital. Considering the feminist poststructural framework and the social capital theoretical perspective, this study focused on what eight women superintendents in Midwest State had to say about their experiences of networking in a male dominated career field. The analyzed data suggests implications for women superintendents, aspiring women superintendents, state organization leaders, and superintendent search consultants—with the principal goal of increasing gender equity in the superintendency in the state.

Women Superintendents

These eight women achieved the highest leadership position one can attain in public education. By conflicting with cultural definitions of women's typical roles, they have displayed impressive commitment to their careers (Marshall, 1981). Implications brought to light in this

study which are key to a women sustaining her superintendency and building social capital are a) being visible in formal and informal social structures in their communities; b) being visible and very involved in the state superintendent association; c) building social networks comprised of both men and women; and d) mentoring other women administrators.

Be visible and involved. The women superintendents participating in this study demonstrated the importance of visibility in their communities. The majority of the women held membership in a handful or more local community organizations. Being visible in the community can be essential to garnering necessary community support for the local school district. Belonging to a diverse range of community networks promotes greater organizing potential (Glanville, 2004). This was evident through Shirley and Dottie's stories. Shirley's presence helped her pass a necessary bond issue in her district, and Dottie garnered community support to combat the wrongful distribution of taxpayer monies. Being present in the community also takes a step toward progress and decreases the notion of women being invisible in educational leadership positions. While some of the women in this study expressed a feeling of obligation and accountability to the public, the truth is their structural relations in the community are critical to sustaining the superintendency (Ortiz, 2001).

Women superintendents should join their state superintendents association, attend meetings at every opportunity, and volunteer for committee work. The state superintendent organization, defined by the women in this study, was the most influential organization in which they belonged. Group membership creates legitimacy. The women in this study who demonstrated a willingness to roll up their sleeves and get involved were not only well known and established in the state, they had also served in key leadership positions in the association. When other influential individuals invest their social capital in others, her social capital and

legitimacy in the organization increases. Since the state superintendents association is considered one of the more influential networks in the state, it stands to reason it is comprised of influential individuals. Developing relationships with high status individuals may increase her social capital and could provide valuable outcomes (de Janasz & Forret, 2008). One does not get a return on her social capital by operating at the periphery. She should be present and engaged at every opportunity as social capital is built over time and through investments (Nooteboom, 2007). Relationships developed through the superintendents association may provide a) the resources needed to receive new and timely information about superintendent vacancies, b) personal influence from high status others, and c) social support to sustain the intensity of the superintendency. Furthermore, increasing internal visibility and engaging in professional organizations maintains the benefits of the association (Forret & Dougherty, 2001).

Build social networks comprised of men and women. Women superintendents should ensure they have cross-gender networks. Research has shown women whose networks are made up of same-sex ties have less access to and return on their social capital (Lin, 2000; McPherson, et al., 2001). The access to and return on social capital investments related to gender was as advantageous for both men and women when women included men in their social networks. Having diverse social ties may result in the received information being of higher quality (Burt, 1998). The women in this study who appeared the most successful in their careers engaged in network activity with men.

Mentor other women administrators. Women superintendents in the state need to make a concerted effort to mentor and support other women in the superintendency. Once they have achieved their goals, they should work to not leave other women behind. Many of the women in this study are wonderful role models. Veteran women superintendents should provide

opportunities for mentorship and networking with women new to the superintendency as well as those who aspire to the superintendency. Young and McLeod (2001) found female role models had a powerful impact on other women administrators. Creating alternative opportunities for women to network socially outside of golf at state conferences may decrease the perpetual perception of women not feeling like they belong.

Aspiring Women Superintendents

Women who aspire to the superintendency do not lack the self-confidence to do the job. In fact, studies (Grogan & Brunner, 2005a, 2005b) report that 40% of women in central office administrative positions feel competent to take on the superintendency. Based on the findings in this study, the implications for women who aspire to the superintendency are a) be comfortable with developing her own career path; b) seek mentors; c) increase social network activity comprised of both men and women; and d) attend conferences and trainings on attaining the superintendency.

Redefine career path. Aspiring women superintendents should travel the path to the superintendency with which they are most comfortable. Normative assumptions about the best path to the superintendency are to spend less time in teaching and more time in administration. This assumption is proving to be false. Each woman in this study spent the time necessary to gain the experience and confidence needed to take on increased responsibilities. Shakeshaft, et al. (2007) posited the lack of leadership identity is what continually feeds the perception that women must gain more information, more education, and more experience prior to applying for a superintendency. As more women become superintendents, the notion of a normalized path to the superintendency as being the best path will disappear.

Seek mentors. Aspiring women superintendents should seek mentors and increase their networks to include both men and women. Sponsors support others, provide expert advice, and create a bridge to social networks (Shakeshaft, et al., 2007). Many of the women in this study pursued administrative or doctoral degrees as a result of the mentoring provided by their supervisors. In short, mentoring can foster a woman's career success and retention in educational leadership positions (Shollen, Bland, Taylor, Weber-Main, & Mulcahy, 2008). Many aspiring women superintendents hold positions in the central office as directors of curriculum and/or human resources. The women who hold these roles and aspire to the superintendency should ensure there are building networks beyond curriculum directors meetings and human resources and curriculum conferences. Since the superintendency is predominantly male, increasing their networks to include high status males will increase their information flow regarding career opportunities. Assistant women superintendents should take note of the unwritten rules of the superintendency regarding what committees, what district-level work, and what networks are most important for career progression.

Attend conferences and trainings. Finally, assistant superintendents who aspire to the superintendency should attend conferences and trainings provided by consulting firms who conduct superintendent searches. This strategy informs those in power that she is seriously considering the move up the career ladder. These trainings may provide expert advice on what school boards desire in their next district leader. This is an insight not provided to all applicants. Additionally, these trainings make aspiring candidates aware of hiring practices and procedures.

State Superintendents Organizational Leadership

Because the state superintendents organization is often the most influential network in which to build social capital, the organization should purposefully create supports for minority

members. Strategies include creating a committee or task force dedicated to sponsor women in their first and second year of the superintendency. A second strategy may be encouraging current superintendents in the organization to invite aspiring women assistant superintendents to meetings. Some of the women in this study indicated they had joined their state organization as an assistant superintendent only to feel excluded from the group. This may indicate that instead of a gender issue there is a legitimacy issue in the organization (Burt, 1998). Acceptance into a social network is increased via a legitimate sponsor.

Consulting Firms

Search consulting firms should hire retired women superintendents to help conduct vacancy searches. As gatekeepers, search consultants represent privileged power. Chase and Bell (1990) found while search consultants were helpful to individual women their discourse and practices continue to reinforce men's dominance in the position. That may very well be true in this state. On an individual basis, many of the women in this study directly benefited from individual support provided by search consultants. However, by providing consultants who are primarily male, if not exclusively male, increases the potential for men to be given privileged access. A study by Marietti and Stout (1994) found women superintendents were often hired by school boards that had majority-female membership. Having only male search consultants reinforces the homophily principle where "contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than dissimilar people" (McPherson, et al., 2001, p. 416). When search consultants interact with and sponsor those who are more like them, women see the superintendency get reinforced as a male-dominant position (McPherson, et al., 2001). If there is a correlation between female school board members hiring female superintendents, then it stands to reason having more women consultants will increase the number of women hired as superintendents.

Personal Reflections

I did not find it necessary for the women in this study to complete a personal reflection. I do, however, find it important to share my thoughts and feelings regarding the narrative inquiry I have undertaken.

Virginia Woolf wrote a complex, stream-of-conscious novel titled *Mrs. Dalloway*. At the completion of her work, she commented she “felt more fully relieved” of her meaning than usual. At the conclusion of this research, I had a moment where I, too, felt fully relieved. However, the catharsis I experienced lasted momentarily and was quickly hijacked by guilt. I began to wonder if somehow I failed in my obligation to re-present the eight superintendents in this study as the women they are—courageous, determined, passionate, servant leaders, strong advocates for all children, and role models. In essence, they represent to what and whom I aspire.

I discovered these women have proven the best way to navigate the rough waters of male-dominated social networks is with swift, direct action. The other side of the discovery coin is that perhaps the waters of male-dominated social networks in this state are actually not so choppy after all. Ay, there’s the rub. Which representation is the truth?

Narrative analysis involves the retelling or re-representation of another’s story. And the moment after catharsis, I began to question how I re-presented them. Was my privileged insight into the interpretation of their stories still their stories? The willing participants in my study took an hour or two out of their very busy afternoons to tell me how they attained the superintendency. While strong and courageous and determined, I also found them to be human and vulnerable. Their vulnerabilities are now mine to protect. And in the middle of the night when I truly grasped the responsibility of my task, I felt vulnerable. Just as they took a risk and opened up their lives to me, I feel the weight of potential criticism for my retelling of their stories.

“To speak or be spoken for is not a one-off event but a process of spanning various narrations, interpretations and reinterpretations, the telling and the representation and reception of the telling” (Gready, 2008, p. 138). The reception of the participants, as well as others, is yet unknown. I hope the authority I had to share the richly descriptive stories of these eight women’s lives proves beneficial and results in more women pursuing leadership positions as superintendents. The women in this research throughout their careers have taken charge of their destinies and blazed trails for which other women can enter and succeed. As a minority representation, they are leading the throngs. And they are doing so with great respect.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

January 2013

Dear [Insert Name of Superintendent]:

My name is Dawn Johnson, and I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research, which is a narrative qualitative study exploring how women superintendents in this state network in formal and informal settings. You are one of ten female superintendents with whom I have sought to participate in this study. The participants chosen lead large and small districts, are located throughout the state, and have varying years of superintendency experience.

Your participation in this study will consist of one 60-90 minute interview, to be conducted at a time and place convenient to you. As a secondary source of data, I am requesting a copy of your vita/resume in order to follow career timelines and membership in professional associations, as well as tailor interview questions specific to you. I am personally interested in hearing your story as a woman superintendent. I wholeheartedly believe the information gathered from your participation will benefit other women who wish to pursue a superintendent position one day.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout my study, and each participant will be given a pseudonym known only to me. Throughout the study, you will have an opportunity to

review your interview transcription and provide feedback on the narrative analysis pertaining to your interview. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.

The stories of your journey to the superintendency as well as the experiences that have come from your position as the district leader are very valuable. I would really appreciate you being a part of this study. **I will follow up with a phone call to your office to answer any questions you may have about this research as well as confirm your participation.** If you agree to participate, I will ask that you sign and return the enclosed informed consent form.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. This dissertation is under the direction of Dr. Jean Patterson, Professor, Department of Educational Leadership at Wichita State University. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at djohnson@usd444.com or on my cell at (316) 655-5401. Dr. Patterson may be reached at (316) 978-6392.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn M. Johnson', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dawn M. Johnson

Doctoral Candidate, Wichita State University

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM



*Department of Educational Leadership
1845 N Fairmount, Wichita, Kansas 67260-0142*

The Intersection of Gender and Social Capital Consent Form

PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in a study of women superintendents in a Midwest state. I hope to provide an informed understanding toward research on women in education as to whether networking and social capital resources are critical to the representation of women superintendents in a Midwest state.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION: Six to twelve participants are sought to participate in individual interviews. You were selected to participate because of your position as a woman superintendent. Of the ten preliminary participants chosen to be a part of this study, three women are superintendents in 1A and 2A district sizes; three are from 3A and 4A district sizes, and four are from 5A and 6A district sizes. Two women are geographically located in the western portion of the state; four women are geographically located in the central portion of the state; and four women are geographically located in the eastern portion of the state.

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES: Your participation will consist of one individual interview that will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will take place in a location that is mutually agreeable to both of us, is convenient for you, and is conducive for conducting a personal interview. I am requesting to view a copy of your resume and/or vita prior to the interview in order to tailor interview questions. With your permission, the researchers will audio-record the interview. You will be invited to check your audio transcription for accuracy and provide feedback to the researcher. Additionally, I am offering you the opportunity to write a personal reflection of your experiences in the superintendency as they relate to networking. This may be a writing you choose to submit after attending professional development activities of your experiences and observations of social networking.

DISCOMFORT/RISKS: During data collection, participants will be encouraged to be open in their responses with the researcher. I will keep all responses confidential. There are no anticipated risks to the participants. All participation will be voluntary, and participants will be apprised of the research purpose and their rights as research subjects.

BENEFITS: The research study is being conducted to meet the requirements of a dissertation for Wichita State University. Results of the study will be provided to the dissertation committee. If you participate, you may benefit from a deeper understanding of social capital as it relates to women superintendents in a Midwest state. This study will benefit women who aspire to the

superintendency. It is possible that I will disseminate the results of this study through presentations at state and national conferences and publication in scholarly journals.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information obtained in this study in which you can be identified will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Your name and the school district in which you are affiliated will not be used.

REFUSAL/WITHDRAWAL: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Wichita State University or your respective school. If you agree to participate in this study, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Dr. Jean Patterson at: 316-978-6392 or jean.patterson@wichita.edu, Educational Leadership Department, Wichita State University, Wichita 67260-0142. If you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, and telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have voluntarily decided to participate in the following activities:

- Interview
- Resume and/or Vita Review

You will be provided with a copy of this consent form for your records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Witness

Date

Request consent form be returned electronically to djohnson@usd444.com or by fax at (620) 897-6201

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

My name is Dawn Johnson, and I am a doctoral candidate at Wichita State University. I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule in order to meet with me today. I have a series of questions regarding the formal and informal social networks of the superintendency. I am curious about your particular experiences and whether from your perspective these networks have contributed to your superintendency.

Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we will be on a first name basis, your name will not be used when I report the results of this research. Additionally, I will be giving you a pseudonym in order to protect your privacy. With your permission I would like to audio-record our session so that I will be able to make accurate notes from your comments. This will also allow me to concentrate on our conversation and not be distracted with note taking. The recording will only be used for the purpose of note taking and will be destroyed upon transcription and the completion of my dissertation. You can be assured that I will conduct this research in accordance with policies and guidelines set forth by Wichita State University. Do I have your permission to record our session together? (If the participant declines this request, I will go over the confidentiality of the study once again. If the participant continues to decline, I will take typed-written notes of the session.)

I want to remind you that your participation in this study is voluntary and you may request to withdrawal at any time. Additionally, you have the right to ask me to turn off the audio recorder at any time. There are no associated risks to this study. This session will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

Would you like to begin?

(Review informed consent document; allow participant to review and ask questions; proceed only after participant has signed the consent form.)

At the conclusion of the interview, ask participant if she is willing to follow-up with a phone call or email if clarification is needed. If she agrees, get her contact information.

Today is _____, and I am interviewing _____.

A. Personal Information/Family Background

1. Tell me a little about you

Probes: Age, race, religion, where grew up, where living now, schooling

2. Can you share with me about your family?

Probes: Married, how long? Children, ages?

B. Work History: (settled talk)

1. Tell me about your career as an educator?

Settled Probes: Career path, years in education, years in each position, future goals, what types of schools have you led (student and staff demographics, school community, district size), has anyone mentored or influenced you toward becoming a superintendent?

C: Superintendent Position:

1. Tell me the process you went through to get your current position

Probes: Formal application process? Network with others about the position first? Seek guidance from a mentor? Encouraged by someone to apply?

2. Do you feel networking was important to your attaining your current superintendency? Why or why not? Has it been important in the past? Do you see it as important for the future?

3. Why do you believe you were hired for this position?

4. What challenges have you had to overcome in your current position? How does that related to challenges you've had in other positions?

5. Based on what you've told me about your career path, would you do anything differently knowing what you know today? Why?

D. Woman administrator? (unsettled talk)

1. Do you feel as a woman superintendent that you've had to overcome challenges that your male peers did not?

2. Do you feel there are barriers to women attaining the superintendency?

3. What strategies have you employed to overcome your challenges?
4. Do you feel it is important for women to mentor other women who aspire to the superintendency?
Why or why not?
5. When you hear about superintendent positions becoming vacant, do you ever do anything with that information?

Probes: Perceived barriers along the journey, what facilitated or stymied mobility from one position to another, what challenges have you faced as a woman administrator?

E. Professional and Interpersonal Contexts of Work

1. What work related professional or voluntary organizations do you participate in outside of your current school district/inside your current school district?

Probes: demographics of organizations, roles within each, personal goals for belonging, goal of the organization.

2. Do you believe it is important to maintain membership and relationship within these organizations?
3. Do you believe some organizations are more powerful than others? Are some more important to belong to than others?
4. Do you socialize outside of work with the same people who belong to your organizations?

F. Relationship Between Personal and Professional Lives

1. Do you belong to organizations or voluntary in organizations outside of your work context?

G. Networking

1. Please describe your networks.
2. Do you believe you network with others in the superintendent/educational administrative community?

Probes: With whom do you network most? Are some people more important or have more power than others? Network for personal or professional reasons?

2. Do you feel you have ever been excluded from a network? If so, why?