

A MULTI- CASE STUDY OF FIVE FEMALE URBAN SUPERINTENDENTS:  
PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP, CHANGE, AND CHALLENGES

by

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B.S., Northern Arizona University, 1982  
M.S., Kansas State University, 1997

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## **Abstract**

Urban school leaders, particularly superintendents are on the frontlines for raising student achievement at all levels. The work of urban superintendents is intensive given the challenges they encounter. Research has indicated that school leaders who possess and enact skills and knowledge that support change leadership. The question, then, is this: what patterns and themes exist in the use of those attributes by female urban superintendents, to support systemic changes in their school districts.

This researcher chose to look at these attributes through the lens of female urban superintendents who were members of the Council of Great City Schools, who had at least three years tenure in the district, and who had realized increased student achievement during their tenure.

This study identified and described through case studies the attributes that emerged from the data. Each of the five participants were interviewed twice with questions based on the leadership attributes Reeves (2007) described, the change attributes Fullan (2009) and Knoster, Villa and Thousand (2000) identified, and the superintendent challenges described by the Texas Education Agency (2007). In addition to the interviews, biographies and vitas were collected. Other artifacts such as news articles, television interviews, district newsletters, and district websites were also reviewed.

The study revealed that there were patterns and themes that emerged based on the leadership and change attributes, and the challenges urban female superintendents encountered. The leadership attributes defined by Reeves (2007) were: communication, vision, relationships, building capacity in others, access the expertise of others, and decision making. The change attributes defined by Fullan (2009) and Knoster, Villa and Thousand (2000) were: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and action plan. The implications of this study revealed that below the

surface of these important attributes and challenges lay social justice issues that may first need to be addressed.

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Approved by:

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Dr. Trudy Salsberry

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first urban superintendency was established in Buffalo, New York in 1837 (Mirel, 1993). At that time, the superintendent was expected to be a manager generally acting as a coordinator to ensure common practices among schools in building maintenance, purchasing materials, and keeping financial records (Carter, & Cunningham, 1997). Today, that role has expanded exponentially. The increase in accountability to the community, school boards, and staff for financial planning, operations, and most importantly student achievement, has made the superintendency of today significantly different than it was at its conception (Glass, et al., 2000). Superintendents of today are Chief Executive Officers of public school districts. Not unlike the corporate world, men hold the majority of these positions.

Ella Flagg Young became the first woman superintendent, in Chicago in 1909 (Blount, 1998). Shortly after her tenure began she declared, “Education is a woman’s natural field and she is no longer to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership” (Glass, 2000, p. 22). At that time women accounted for 9% of all superintendents (Blount, 1998). The “golden age” of women in administration came between the years 1900-1930 when nearly 28% of the nation’s superintendents were women (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Flagg Young’s optimism notwithstanding, the number of female superintendents fluctuated considerably with the all-time low in the 1970s at 3% (Jordan, Hunter, & Derrick, 2008).

Recent statistics tell us that today there are fewer female superintendents than in 1930 (Glass, & Franceschini, 2007). In 2007, 21.7% of all superintendents in the United States were women (Glass, & Franceschini, 2007). AASA, (2010) reported the number of women in the top spot is slightly up from the 2007 numbers to 24.1%. The statistics indicated that women are less likely to access the superintendency in urban districts compared to rural districts (AASA, 2010).

Urban school superintendents have one of the most important and challenging educational jobs in our country. They are charged with making rapid improvements in the academic achievement of our nation's most vulnerable, at-risk students. They face considerable barriers to reform and building capacity for quality instruction (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). The sheer number of schools within their district, each with different needs and expectations, make the transformational leadership challenge more complex. To lead change and realize continuous improvement in achievement, urban school superintendents must unite parents, educators, school boards, and leaders within the community (AASA, 2011). In the highly politicized environment of large city school districts, superintendents must be statesmen, change agents, mediators, and visionaries. Urban school superintendents must break down barriers to build capacity to reform many aspects of the school system. They must communicate a clear, coherent vision of learning for all students (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006)).

Accountability from local power, as well as from the state and national government, add a great deal of stress to a job that is already much more than most people are prepared for, particularly in this age of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the accountability that holds. Additionally, there were grave financial concerns with the 2008 downturn in the economy. Districts across the country have realized substantial losses of state funding and have had to make drastically deep cuts in school budgets (AASA, 2011). Economic hard times for schools demanded more problem solving skills, more communication and collaboration among stakeholders, and leadership from top level leaders (AASA, 2011). Boards of Education who sought new leadership in these challenging times were hard pressed to find the "perfect fit". That "perfect fit" almost always meant someone who had financial savvy, worked within

collaborative groups, had outstanding communication skills, and possessed a deep understanding of curriculum, instruction, and transformational leadership (Glass, et al., 2000).

Even with the almost insurmountable challenges, there were many urban school districts that had accomplished significant reform by superintendents with the leadership skills to create and sustain noteworthy change (Council of Great City Schools, 2010). Not surprisingly, many of the turnaround change agents were women who took on the top district level position. The Council of Great City Schools is an organization that provides research, and professional development, and monitors member districts' student achievement. The CGCS membership provides services and advocates for 65 of this nation's most urban school districts. This study will detail the perceptions of some successful urban female superintendents who are member districts in the Council of Great City Schools.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2010), urban school districts were defined as districts with a high-density population per square mile that typically had higher levels of poverty, high minority populations, higher percentage of non-English speaking students, and high levels of parent unemployment. Thus, urban districts typically had higher levels of disadvantaged or at-risk students than do suburban and rural districts. Urban school districts tend to have fewer resources, and higher rates of turnover for all levels of school staff, including teachers, principals and superintendents. School boards tend to be fractured in focus, unable or unwilling to work together to support a single vision for the district (Hill, Campbell, & Harvey, 2000). Urban school districts tend to have much higher rates of high school dropouts than their rural and suburban counterparts (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

The typical urban school districts saw dropout rates of up to 50%, and poverty rates of upwards of 80%, according to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA,



2010). In addition, urban school boards were plagued with political agendas and ineffective collaboration skills that intensify stress for top leaders. Continuity in leadership from both the board of education as well as from a superintendent was a serious problem for many urban systems. The typical tenure for urban superintendents was 2.75 years according to an AASA, 2010 study. School board elections are held every two to four years in most states, allowing for regular membership turnover (AASA, 2010). Sustained leadership from both the superintendent and the board of education has been rare, adding to the challenge of urban education.

Few women have held the superintendent position in urban school districts since the creation of the public school system in the mid-1800s. In the early 1900s, women advanced rapidly in the teaching profession (Blount, 1998). It would seem then, that within a generation or so, women would progress into top leadership positions. While women have made great strides moving towards equality in education, remarkably few can be found in the executive offices of the urban school systems in the United States. Women held the majority of lower level educational positions; from para professional positions, to teaching positions and curriculum leader positions. Women represent about 74% of employees in public schools but only 21.7% of superintendent positions (Glass, & Franceschini, 2007). The Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title IV part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Employment Opportunities Act of 1972 all called for equal opportunities for women and minorities (Rai & Critzer, 2000). Still, 40-50 years later, change has been painfully slow for women moving into the executive office of urban school districts.

Interestingly, women held central office credentials in record numbers and outnumber men in graduate education leadership programs, yet they lagged significantly behind in holding the top leadership positions. Women, unlike men, typically work through the ranks of school district leadership through building leadership then central office curriculum leadership positions giving

them the added curriculum and instructional leadership experience that men who reach the superintendency often do not have (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Men dominated the field for a number of reasons. The reasons stem from both internal and external forces women faced as they aspired to the superintendency. Internal barriers were numerous and individual, not the least of which include having few mentors and few role models to support women as they rise through the ranks of district administration. External barriers begin with cultural expectations that carry through to school boards and search firms who did not consider female candidates (Glass, & Franceschini, 2007).

Often urban school boards hired search firms to find a group of qualified superintendent candidates who met a set of qualifications determined by the school board. Most often, the qualifications included knowledge of reform models, skills in finance, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and collaboration and change management (Tallerico, 2000). The firms hired to do the search were often staffed with retired male superintendents who were charged with sifting through application packets and choosing candidates with professional credentials, experience, and often connections with the individuals or teams conducting the search (Tallerico, 2000). Few hiring consultants advocated for women according to Brunner's (2002) research. Most were in the business "to make money by giving boards what they are looking for and most boards aren't quite ready", Brunner argues, "to hire a woman in the top district leadership position" (Brunner, 2002, p.43).

There have been a significant number of women who held a central office license and had the qualification in leadership that boards of education were looking for but for a number of reasons, were not hired into the top district positions. Often, in difficult times, boards of education become more conservative in their searches and often articulated qualities that were

more often assigned to men. They often thought in terms of “tough” single-minded leadership rather than cohesive, collaborative or group vision (Tallerico, 2000). This set of characteristics was assigned, more often, to men and in the patriarchal, hegemonic tradition of our culture. Men were chosen over women who may, in fact, had more and better skills to successfully lead urban school districts through the toughest of times (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Women who aspired to the challenges of the superintendency had unique characteristics and unique experiences (Glass, 2004). Many of these characteristics and experiences have commonalities. On average, women with district office licensure had 15 years classroom experience while men with the same licensure had 5 years of experience. Women were likely to work within collaborative groups, a research proven strategy to obtain the desired results of increased student achievement (Glass, 2004).

Women face remarkable challenges in fulfilling their district leadership aspirations even when they held the credentials, the skills, and the knowledge to take on the superintendency. Often, women had years of experience in the classroom, in building level leadership, and central office leadership, giving them the skills and experiences to bring about change. However, when it came to the highest level of leadership, women were overlooked, often, in favor of less qualified men (*Urban Indicator*, winter 2008-2009.)

Women continue to outnumber men in earning postgraduate degrees in educational leadership, including doctorate degrees. However, accessing the superintendency was often out of reach for these women. In 2001, 65% of doctorate degrees in education were earned by women (Jordan, Hunter & Derrick, 2008). Typically, women who aspired to the superintendency had greater academic credentials than did men aspiring to the same position (Glass, 2004). More knowledge and experience in leadership, finance, and curriculum, along

with a tighter connection to student achievement and accountability made women more qualified to serve in the top leadership positions.

The rate of women in mid-level administration, principals, assistant principals, and even at the district level as directors has seen a steady increase over time. The American Association of School Administrators (2011) reported that the number of women in these positions has increased from 6.6 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2006. While still not aligned with the number of women holding building level and district level licensure, these data showed a significant yet slow increase over time. There have not been such significant gains in the superintendency, however (AASA, 2010).

Although numerous studies on the role of the superintendent have been conducted throughout time, predictably, these studies focused on men. Not until recently has the study of female superintendents as a group become of interest to researchers. Perhaps enticed by the new age of reform, newer accountability laws and budgetary concerns, boards of education have begun to tap the female talent pool that in the past may not have been of great interest. Still women are desperately underrepresented both in the top spot of district leadership and in the research (Tallerico, 2000).

For decades research in school leadership focused on males (Tallerico, 2000). Career paths men took to reach the superintendency were studied widely, as well as leadership skills and managerial skills. From time to time, some women have been included in studies but the particular characteristics and unique experiences women have has been teased out of these studies. The research, like the superintendency, has been an “ole boys” network for decades (Tallerico, 2000). The time has come to research women in the superintendency. Studying women in the superintendency can serve not only women already in the position but those who

aspire to be district leaders. Given the ongoing challenges of urban districts, a different set of leadership characteristics may serve those students better.

Studies have been done describing why women lag behind in taking on the top leadership positions. Dr. Marie Latham Bush (2006) reports that the four most common obstacles female administrators face include: “gender, race, lack of mentors and lack of role models” (AASA). Latham Bush studied female, minority superintendents for her doctoral dissertation. She reported, “race and gender do have an impact on female superintendents’ careers” (Latham Bush, 2006, p. 46). There were too few mentors and role models to “navigate the old boys’ network,” according to Dr. Latham Bush (Latham Bush, 2005, p. 57). Tallerico et al., and others had remarkably similar findings, as they researched and talked to women who have reached the top level in district administration successfully.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Valian, (1999) documented several invisible barriers, such as lack of mentors, combined with overt discrimination practices that keep women from rising to the top. “A woman does not walk into a room with status equivalent to a man” (Valian, 1999, p. 5). Employers’ gender schema represented women as less capable than men, they were likely to overestimate a man’s qualifications and underestimate a woman’s (Valian, 1999). With such a strong patriarchal hegemony, it is crucial to look at the work of women in the superintendency through the lens of feminist critical theory. This examination of women urban superintendents’ perceptions of leadership challenges to transform student achievement was viewed through the lens of critical feminist theory. In addition, change theory and leadership theory both underpinned this study.

Change in urban school districts is imperative. Reforms of the past have not yielded the necessary growth in student achievement. Fullan (2008) explained that theory was “merely a

way of organizing ideas that make sense of the world,” (p.1). Organizational change theory, Fullan (2008) explains, was “synergistic, heavily nuanced and motivationally embedded” (p. 10). The theory dynamics were; “love your employees; connect peers with purpose; capacity building; learning is the work; transparency rules; and systems learning” (Fullan, 2008, p.11). Fullan (2008) contended if each dynamic was in place along with specific components, change would occur. When the goal was to embrace systems change, leaders of change must embrace disequilibrium to move forward. Each component of change was supported in Fullan’s (2005) analysis of several studies in his book, *Leadership & Sustainability*. He found that high-poverty successful urban school districts had the following common attributes:

1. Focused on achievement, standards, and instructional practice
2. Created concrete accountability systems in relation to results
3. Focused on the lowest-performing schools
4. Adopted district wide curricular and instructional approaches
5. Established district wide professional development and support for consistent implementation
6. Drove reform into the classroom by defining the role for central offices of guiding, supporting, and improving instruction at the building level
7. Committed themselves to data-driven decision making and instruction
8. Started the reform at the elementary level
9. Provided intensive instruction in reading and math to middle and high school students. (Fullan, 2005 p. 2)

Fullan (2005) described the kind of responsibility and skill set not just in leadership but in relationships, communication, and knowledge of curriculum and instruction. These were the

typical characteristics of teachers, particularly female teachers. In many ways, the kinds of skills and knowledge needed to create and foster change that will support long term student achievement can be found in the many women who work in each and every school building in this country. Little attention was paid to supporting and developing these women into savvy leaders prepared for the superintendent's office (Marzano, & Waters, 2009).

Leadership studies over the past twenty years have been divided about what traits women exhibit. Some researchers reported that men and women held many common leadership traits (Denmark, 1977; Estler, 1987; Haslett, Geis, & Carter, 1992). Although the most recent research (Brunner, & Grogan, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1995), indicated, "women and men approach the job of school administrator differently and consequently, respond in ways that are often dissimilar... as a group, women tend to have different administrative styles than do men and that effectiveness for a female may depend on this altered approach" (Shakeshaft, 1995, p. 93).

There have been some regional studies of women superintendents. *Ladies Who Lead: Voices of Authentic Character: Women in the Role of Superintendent*, Jordan, et al., (2008) is an in-depth study of female superintendents in Virginia. Another regional study, "*Successful Women: Developing Leaders, Learning from Failures*" (2000), describes six women superintendents in Texas. Studies abounded in describing women superintendents within state lines or small, defined regions such as the upper mid-west or the New England states. There are many studies defining the struggles faced by women of color who chose to seek the superintendency. Still other studies of women in the superintendency teased out certain themes like career paths, the search process or the role mentors play for women who became superintendents.

Studies of urban women in the superintendency were woefully lacking. No documentation of women urban superintendents' leadership in student achievement was found. Studying the experiences of women who lead change to encourage growth in student achievement is long overdue.

The urgency of change leadership in urban school districts and the unique experiences women bring to bear was the essence of this study. Documenting the perspectives of selected women whose districts were members in the Council of Great City was the aim of this study. This examination of women urban superintendents' perceptions of leadership challenges to transform student achievement was viewed through the lens of critical feminist theory. In addition, change theory and leadership theory both underpinned this study. This study will describe the lived experiences of women superintendents who navigated the leadership and change challenges of the urban superintendency.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are considerable challenges facing the American education system, particularly urban education. High school dropout rates remain high in urban districts. The achievement gap among minority students and students from poverty continues to negatively impact individuals and society as a whole. Students who drop out of high school are more likely to serve time in prison, be unemployed and be victims of crime (AASA 2010). The global economy calls for higher skill levels in reading, math and technology (*Urban Indicator*, winter 2008-2009). Students in many urban school districts are not college or career ready (*Urban Indicator*, winter 2008-2009). The success of urban school superintendents in creating change to increase student achievement are essential to understand and replicate.



The U.S. Census Bureau (2010), called the school superintendency the most male dominated executive position in the nation. Research about women in the superintendency was a new concept and only began to thrive in the 1990s. (Brunner, & Grogan, 2007) More recently, research about women in educational leadership positions, particularly the superintendency is moving past simple gender studies and more about skills, abilities and knowledge—still unanswered questions remain. This study will address the challenges female urban superintendents face in creating change through leadership in their school districts.

While there are many failing urban districts throughout the United States, a significant number defy the odds and show remarkable success. These districts have undergone significant reform in order to make progress towards student success for all. Many of these successful urban districts have extraordinary women in the top leadership positions.

This study is about women in the urban school superintendency at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century who overcame significant challenges in their school districts. The researcher will document the perceptions of female superintendents in urban districts regarding the common challenges they faced, leadership for change strategies they used, and the experiences these women described in leading schools to improving student achievement. These women dealt with constant change; sustained high levels of student achievement, and responded to the never-ending politics of the job. This is a description of the forces that came to bear on female superintendents who were leaders of substantial change in moving an underperforming urban district to a high achieving one against all odds. The perspectives of feminist theory, change theory, and leadership theory guided this investigation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand and interpret how female leaders used their skills in leadership and change to create student success. Studying and documenting the experiences women encounter as they attempted to create and maintain sustained systemic increase in student achievement in the urban setting will provide practical information for many leaders in education administration. This study will add to the body of research on urban female superintendents, and how they perceive their efforts in closing the achievement gap.

### **Main Research Question**

What patterns exist in the perceptions of urban female superintendents with respect to the challenges of leadership and change?

### **Research Sub Questions**

1. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' practices from a leadership perspective?
2. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' use of change theory practices for improving student achievement?
3. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenges participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency?

A compilation of interviews, as well as individual vitas and biographies will be analyzed and interpreted so that common perceptions of challenges will be reported.

### **Methodology**

This study's approach was a multi-case study. This was selected to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of women in the urban superintendency. According to Creswell (1998) a qualitative case study, "is a holistic, in-depth analysis of an entire case" (p.63). This study was a multi-case study of five urban superintendents who have served in that capacity for not less than three years. Each of these five districts had realized significant growth in student achievement under the leadership of the current female superintendent. Each subject participated in a set of two interviews with follow up emails to verify information. Other sources of data collection included in this study were biographies collected about each participant from public websites, a vita from each, and other relevant public documents related to the participants and their school districts. Each participant served in member districts of the Council of Great City Schools, an organization that provided research, professional development, and strong advocacy for high levels of student learning. Through data collection and detailed analysis themes emerged (Creswell, 1998).

### **Significance of the Study**

Successful women urban superintendents may lead change and build capacity for substantial increases in student achievement in common ways. Identifying commonalities and articulating the challenges and experiences of these women is critical to understand. This study is an examination of what successful urban women superintendents do to meet the multi-faceted challenges they face. Offering research that women can draw upon to be successful in the superintendency was the goal of this study. Many highly educated, well qualified, talented women are poised to take on the challenges of the superintendency and need to understand the experiences of those who now serve in that role. Studying the experiences of those who have

been successful will help validate and encourage other urban superintendents and provide information to those waiting in the wings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to a multi-case study of five female superintendents in urban school districts. The participants were nominated by a board member from the Council of Great City School. Each has served in their current district for not less than three years and has realized growth in student achievement.

No personal meetings or observations were possible. This study was limited to self-reporting of the women involved. A series of two, 20-30 minute interviews were conducted, along with vitas, biographies, and other public documents being collected to learn more about each of the participants. Self-reporting in the interviews and the analysis of information in the vitas and biographies are somewhat subjective. Additionally, the examination of women only, did not assume the findings differ from men.

This study is limited to urban districts with increased student achievement. This increase may not solely be the result of the current superintendent. While many of the conclusions may not be generalized to all urban districts, it is important to understand the implications and further study.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a short historical background of the superintendency, the demands of urban school district's top spot, and the status of women in position. A significant gap remains between the number of women in top school district leadership positions and the number of women qualified to take on such roles. This chapter describes some reasons there are so few women superintendents in urban school districts. There is little research to support women in

their quest to be successful urban superintendents. There are, however, common challenges shared among the women who do serve in urban districts' top positions. This study examined how women lead for change, viewed through the lens of feminist critical theory, leadership, and change theory. Given the significant challenges facing districts with high numbers of at-risk students, it is time to look at what women do to lead change to increase student achievement. The purpose and significance of this study and limitations are addressed as well.

Chapter two expands on the literature that has been expressed briefly in this chapter. The literature about women in the top ranks of American public school systems is somewhat limited. The review presented here will be highlighted in three areas; (1) the challenges of the superintendency: background, related women's issues, urban school districts; (2) theoretical framework: change theory and leadership as they apply to increased student achievement; feminist critical theory; (3) the intersection of gender, leadership, and change in the urban setting.

Chapter three describes the research design and methodology used to guide the collection and analysis of the data. An overview of the participants in the study also is provided.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth description each participant and the district she serves.

Chapter five reports the analytic process used to determine the findings.

Chapter five also summarizes the findings related to the original research questions.

Finally, Chapter six summarizes the study, discusses the implications of the findings, and provides recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

Research that focuses on women in leadership roles in K-12 education is a relatively recent phenomenon. Given the extraordinary challenges in education, it is critical to reflect on what research tells us about why so few women access the top leadership role. This chapter presents a review of the literature related to female superintendents. This study will examine what the literature says about women's leadership strategies and the use of change theory related to student achievement. This chapter examines the challenges of women in leadership roles.

This study will examine at how a woman's career path to the superintendency is different from the career path of a man on the same trajectory, giving women a different skill set. This chapter reviews literature from previous studies that chart and compare the difference in time and experience men and women's careers take on the road to the superintendency. This study will look at what principles of change influence the leadership skill set women used.

### **The Challenges of the Superintendency Background**

The birth of the American school system really took place in the small one-room homes of colonial mothers and fathers who felt that at least their male children needed to be able to read the Bible. Reading was the first and often the only subject taught in these "classrooms". Over time, as communities grew into cities, more and more basic information had to be shared and understood. Communities focused on educating the male children first. More wealthy communities educated female offspring in manners, cultural norms, and fine arts, along with literacy (Kowalski, 2006).

The Law of 1642, also known as the Old Deluder Satan Act in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, required all parents and “masters” to ensure the education of their own children ([www.http://nd.edu](http://nd.edu)). The law required that children be taught the capital laws of the Commonwealth and the principles of religion (Kowalski, 2006). The superintendent position emerged a decade or so after the first public schools. In the beginning, teachers and school boards ran schools. State legislatures enacted laws for public education and allocated money to help local communities fund their schools. At the start of the nineteenth century, lawmakers saw a need to have an accounting system for these funds. As funding increased, the time required by school boards or school committees became so burdensome that paid state officers were designated to take care of accounting responsibilities and other school related activities (AASA, 2000). This led to a full-time job and New York is credited with appointing the first state superintendent in 1812 (Hill & Celio, 1998). Shortly after, other states followed suit.

The state superintendent was charged with distribution of state funds and collecting data. There was little influence on educational issues by state superintendents (Hill & Cleio, 1998). As communities grew, state officers were unable to visit and oversee new schools so more and more responsibilities were delegated to local school systems. Within a few short years, the local school superintendency was established. The local superintendent was responsible for managing state funds as well as appointing and supervising teachers. In some cases, was charged with testing students (Hill & Cleio, 1998).

The first large-city superintendency was established in Buffalo, New York in 1837. The number of superintendents grew quickly as American cities in the Northeast grew. The superintendent’s responsibilities were primarily managerial. They were expected to purchase materials, maintain buildings, and keep financial records. Early superintendents often spent their

time with routine tasks in assisting the school board in ensuring state requirements were met (Kowalski, 2006). Nearly all were White male Protestants whose charge was to ensure the Americanization of large numbers of immigrants (State University of New York, 2000).

The typical tenure of the first urban superintendents was lengthy, often lasting twenty years (State University of New York, 2000). Many urban superintendents after World War I were instrumental in creating training programs at the university level for their successors (Columbia University, 2010). Often the same superintendents became professors of training programs. The literature describes most of the early urban superintendents as “imposing, adroit politicians, community development activists and shrewd business executives” (State University of New York, 2000).

Throughout the first decades, few women held the superintendent positions in urban areas. The few that held those positions were nearly always interims while a suitable male could be found. The tenure of women was typically about one year (AASA, 2000). Now, women make up 22 percent of all superintendent positions, most in rural areas. This number is up from 16 percent in 2000 and 6.6 percent in 1992 (AASA, 2010).

### **Related Women’s Issues**

Ginn (1989) reports that men dominated the teaching profession from colonial times through the beginning of nineteenth century. Because teaching salaries were extremely low, the number of women increased dramatically as men left the field. At the same time a significant shift came with the Industrial Age when men left the classroom for more lucrative jobs in industry (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). With the demand for teaching younger children and the demand for more literate workers, women were more accepted in the profession. Although teaching was thought of as a transient profession for women waiting for marriage, the number of



women teaching grew. The large number of women teaching allowed the few men left in the profession to move into management (Ginn, 1989). This patriarchal hierarchy continues in education.

Women remained in the lower rungs of the teaching profession even when marriage did not interrupt their career. Men were thought of as more reliable managers and moved quickly into administration. Marriage for the male teacher or administrator did not conflict with their career. Men were assumed to support a family while women were assumed to be supporting only themselves (Ginn, 1989). Few school leadership positions were held by women, particularly at the secondary level, the key stepping stone for the superintendent position (Blount, 1998).

Ginn (1989) found that the economic hardships of World War II allowed large numbers of men to take advantage of the veteran's funds to enter administrative programs. Women were not afforded this opportunity though many were in the military and many more supported war efforts at home. Male teachers increased significantly for a few years following the war but they did not remain in the classroom long. Many men taught for a few years then moved on to more lucrative careers or moved into principalships and superintendencies (Ginn, 1989).

Ginn (1989) acknowledges situational and regional instances where women did outnumber men in educational administration. In the 1900s women outnumbered men as elementary principals but that number dropped from a high of fifty-five percent in 1928 to eighteen percent in 1984 (Ginn, 1989), Cunanan (1994) offers several explanations for the lack of female representation in school leadership, including inadequate preparation and lack of recruitment. Women also lack the financial support to complete educational administration preparation programs when positions may not be available to them upon program completion. Women also

face cultural constraints that in the past have not encouraged women to seek leadership positions that would qualify them for the superintendency (Cunanan, 1994).

Women have typically been instructional leaders, whether from the confines of the classroom or as part of leading curriculum and instructional committees or at the district level. In the past, the role of instructional leader was not part of the superintendent's job description. Instead, management of district level departments including finance, maintenance, operations and political savvy were considered most important and usually assigned to males. As early as 1983, however, studies of exemplary superintendents identified instructional leadership as a strong common thread in high performing districts. Interestingly, skills in instructional leadership are more often a strong characteristic possessed by female leaders whose leadership path typically includes years of curriculum work at the district level (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Every ten years since 1923 there has been a study or yearbook providing statistics and demographics along with narrative about the state of educational leadership. In 1923 George Strayer, professor of education administration at Teachers College, Columbia University was the first to provide an organized yearbook documenting data along with a discussion of current topics for superintendents. In the decades that followed, yearbooks generally collected demographic data as well as current issues facing the superintendents (AASA, 2006)

Studies are now part of the American Association of School Administrators. The themes of these studies over the decades reflect the times in which they were conducted. In the early years, the AASA studies featured fiscal, personnel, and facility themes. In later decades, the studies reflected the country's interest in post-World War II patriotism and in 1960, the study primarily dealt with the rapid expansion of school populations and the role of public schools in society. The 1970 study focused on extensive demographic data and the "technical" work of the

superintendent (Glass, 2006). Finally, *The American School Superintendency 1982*, established specific parameters for the next three, ten-year studies.

The data on female superintendents is not reported on a regular basis but a gradual increase, although not representative of the number of women in education or those with advanced degrees in educational leadership, has been noted. In 1960, no female superintendents were identified in the data. In years when data are reported, the studies show that female superintendents increased from about 1% in 1923 to about 21.7% in 2006 (Glass, 2006).

In 83 years, the number of women in the superintendency increased by only 20%. Interestingly, more than 75% of educators are women. The literature describes the absence of women in the superintendency under the general themes of board/community resistance, lack of preparation, lack of mentors, and the lack of interest in recruiting women by search firms (Dana, & Bourisaw, 2006). There are social constraints that cause women to be somewhat reluctant to take on the top district spot. These reasons include family and community responsibilities that are part of socially constructed gender roles for women.

Marilyn Tallerico (2000) studied all aspects of obtaining the superintendent position in her study *Accessing the Superintendency*. In her work, she discusses that career paths differ among women and men who aspire to the superintendency, giving men and women different skill sets. Men, typically spend five years or less as a classroom teacher and then move into a high school principal position. Within a short span of time, often about five years, these principals obtain their first superintendency.

Women, on the other hand, according to Tallerico's (2000) work, usually spend about fifteen years in the classroom. They then move into an elementary principalship or curriculum work position where they spend up to ten years. Women, then are older when they first seek a

superintendent position. According to Tallerico (2000) women do not seek the superintendency until age 50 and this is often considered the “twilight ideal career path” (Tallerico, 2000, pp.76-77). By this time, a women’s candidacy is less desirable to boards of education, who do not want to hire someone who is closing in on retirement (Tallerico, 2000).

This additional time women take to reach the superintendent position are not wasted years. These years spent in curriculum development, professional development, and other leadership positions help women build and refine skills in not only leadership but collaboration and interpersonal skills. These skills are key in bringing about change to increase student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The unfolding of women’s experiences in developing into top leaders cannot be separated from gender.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Change Theory as it Applies to Increased Student Achievement**

Synonyms for change include transformation, revolution, and conversion. Each of these words have highly emotional connotations. Just the word ‘change’ evokes excitement or fear in people within an organization. Change is labeled as hard work with no guarantee of success. In fact, failure is often the initial stage of change (Reeves, 2006). Marzano (2009) calls change the growth that comes from disequilibrium or the tension that happens as learning occurs in the initial stages of change.

Reeves (2006) states, “much of what is labeled a ‘change initiative’ is little more than window dressing on a crumbling foundation” (Hargreaves & Fullan, Eds. 2009, p. 237). Real, sustainable change takes significant vision and communication to build networks within organizations to create sustainable change. Theories of change abound in education. Perhaps there is no menu or systematic guide that creates the change necessary to increase student

achievement, close the achievement gap, and move American students towards global competitiveness (Hargreaves & Fullan Eds. 2009). Senge (1999) contends, “Most people will not change unless they feel a sense of crisis” (p. 79). Yet, there is a sense of crisis in most school districts across the United States, particularly in urban school districts where the high school dropout rate is often above 50%, and the achievement gap impacts every classroom.

Change, then is one of many competing forces for superintendents. In *The Challenge for Change* (2009), Fullan asserts that educational leaders must expect change and manage it in a way that people feel successful each step of the way. Knoster, Villa, and Thousand (2000) expand on the research about change with their Managing Complex Change Matrix. This matrix advises there are five necessary components to successful change. These include vision; skill, incentives, resources and an action plan (see Appendix E). Without these things in place, implementation not will occur. Frustration, anxiety, confusion, resistance and false starts will overtake the change initiatives. Fullan, (2005) defines the purpose of educational change as “effectively replacing some structures, programs, and/or practices with better ones” (p. 15). This is dynamic work that involves top down and bottom up leadership (Fullan, 2005).

Kagan and Laskow Lahey (2009) contend that true, sustainable change comes about when the existing processes are challenged; there is an inspired shared vision; conflict is managed; problems are solved; tasks are delegated; people are empowered, and relationships are built. Kagan and Laksow Lahey’s (2009) work is not dissimilar from that of Fullan (2005) and Reeves (2006). How then, do women confront the challenge of change within a school district?

Grogan and Shakeshaft’s studies (1999 & 2011) establish that women are motivated by a passion and vision to see students succeed. Women work collaboratively, build relationships, and share decision making in order to create environments that empower teachers and building

leaders to learn new skills and use resources to ensure increased achievement results. The incentives are constructed within the supportive relationships among colleagues and the community (Chase, 1995). Organizational change is interwoven within the fabric of transformational leadership. To understand how change successfully unfolds, one must understand leadership.

### **Leadership Theory**

Leadership is a multifaceted construct that requires interdependence to achieve defined organizational goals (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Northouse (2001) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Leadership occurs in groups and has a set of characteristics widely defined by experts. There are many ways to influence groups to achieve goals. Achieving common goals that bring about sustained improvement is a standard in school districts, particularly in urban school systems.

Leadership is categorized by skills or strategies by authors such as Northouse (2001), Reeves (2003), Fullan (2010), Marzano and Waters (2009). Northouse (2001) relates transformational leadership as a model first described by Burns (1978), and expanded and refined by Bass (1985). These authors explain transformational leadership as a continuum ranging from one end as “laissez-faire leadership” with the center point being “transactional leadership” and finally, to the left end, “transformational leadership” (Northouse, 2001).

Burns (1978) argues that transformational leadership is highly motivational. Followers are willing to do more than expected, to achieve specific goals they have come to value and idealize (Burns, 1978). Followers transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization (Burns, 1978). The factors in transformational leadership include: “idealized influence; charisma, inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation and individualized

consideration” (Northouse, 2001). Leaders with these factors provide followers with a vision and sense of mission. They are respected and trusted by followers (Northouse, 2001).

Transformational leaders communicate high expectations to followers, inspiring them to commit to a shared vision for the organization. Followers are intellectually stimulated to be creative and innovative; they challenge their own beliefs and values (Northouse, 2001). Transformational leaders provide a climate of support and trust characterized by “benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence” (Tschannen-Moran, p. 17).

A cornerstone of leadership involves recognizing the need for change. The tendency for organizations, schools in particular to be comfortable with the status quo is well documented (Fallan, 2010). Transformational leaders are change agents. They have the responsibility to create an environment of continuous improvement (Fallan, 2010). Fullan (2005) argues that transformational leadership must be further defined for sustainability. He reasons that within the factors of transformational leadership, detailed characteristics must be present (Fallan, 2005). These characteristics include: “leading with a compelling purpose; collective moral purpose; the right bus; capacity building; lateral capacity building; ongoing learning; productive conflict; a demanding culture; external partners, and growing financial investment” (Fallan, 2005, p. 66).

Kouzes and Posner (1997) contend that communicating the vision through powerful, positive communication is the apex for transformational leadership and sustained change. Women in leadership positions have honed communication skills since early childhood (Valian, 1999) and are therefore better prepared for such leadership challenges. Valian (1999) argues that women by the nature of socialization are more likely to have all the factors necessary to lead transformationally. The conventional expectations of heroic leadership in urban school districts are, in reality, the search for transformational leadership (Hess, 1999).

## **Feminist Critical Theory**

“The feminist researcher puts the social construct of gender at the center of inquiry” (Marshall, 1997, p. 4). The lack of attention to gender, both conceptually and as an analytical lens, means that the differential experiences of women and men are attributed to individual differences rather than to the consequences of a male ordered world (Scott, 1988). When gender is acknowledged, it is usually treated as a demographic characteristic rather than a conceptual category or analytical category (Marshall, 1997). To truly understand some things clearly we must restrict our focus in a way that highlights certain elements and ignores others, just as a camera close-up crystalizes whatever it frames and blurs the background (Tyson, 2006).

For this study, the researcher selected critical theory to “focus on the relationship between power and culture, ideologies, knowledge and language that marginalize people primarily based on sex”, (Gilligan, 1982, p.5). Both liberal feminist theory and cultural feminist theory were also considered. Neither provided a dimension through which to view all the elements of this study.

Critical theory is a lens through which interpretations are made (Gilligan, 1982). Feminist critical theory has several distinct variations. For this study the focus is based on Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) definition that women and men develop differently and therefore make judgments and decisions based on early socialization. Women view the world through relationships hence judgments and decisions are consistent with the ethic of caring (Gilligan, 1982). Feminist critical theory recognizes the missing voice of women in more traditional androcentric research (Noddings, 1984).

Listening closely to how women report their experiences is necessary if we want to understand what professional women are telling us about their power and subjection (Chase, 1995). Chase (1995) found that women superintendents embrace their professional



competencies while fully acknowledging their continuous subjection to gendered inequalities in the profession. They construct individual solutions to problems of gender bias (Chase, 1995). Making sense of women's experiences then, calls for a sharper focus on how and why certain themes emerge.

Valian (1999) explains that there are invisible factors within which all humans operate. These factors are implicit or nonconscious elements that play a central role in the professional lives of men and women (Valian, 1999). She reports that gender schema is unarticulated and inadvertently influences every aspect of professional life. Valian (1999) showed in her research, that "tiny biases, in favor of men, accumulate exponentially over time" (p.3). This study's focus on women superintendents in urban school districts necessitates a framework for interpreting the narratives they provide. Critical feminist theory is the best fit.

### **The Intersection of Gender, Leadership, and Change in the Literature**

Scholars who study women in top leadership positions in education see gender issues as both cultural and innate (Valian, 1999). They report similar themes and characteristics that seem to be more common in top leaders. When compared and contrasted with the characteristics top male leaders exhibit there are several notable differences.

Women and men are different in the way they communicate, the way they lead organizations and the way they work. As more and more women have entered school leadership positions, more information has become available to discuss and compare. Women often bring an alternate way of leading school systems that include strong relationship ties (Grogan, 1996). Women highly value emotional connections and collaborative types of activities, according to Grogan. Women describe themselves as reflective and focused on student learning. Given that women often move from central office curriculum positions to the superintendency, this is not surprising.

Grogan reports that women see themselves throughout their career as “leading through others”, and this does not change once they reach the top district spot (Grogan, 1996, p.12).

While there are many differences between men and women leaders, Brunner and Grogan begin their study, *Women Leading Systems* (2007) by referencing several common factors that are crucial for both genders. These are identified as:

1. Role models or mentors who advise and support the aspiring candidate
2. Community involvement
3. Leadership experiences both in the educational setting and in the community
4. Advance degrees in leadership curriculum
5. In-depth understanding of the educational system-curriculum, budget, technology, legal issues, personnel, leadership and the improvement process. (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p.8)

For women, it is important to *understand* the masculine leadership model but not necessarily to *follow* that model. The authoritative model of leadership is fairly typical in White male leaders but according to the research of current best practices, this model is not the most productive (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Solving problems in isolation or with a small group of like-minded colleagues is another characteristic to be aware of but not to follow. Gender distinctions between rational and emotional, for example, have long been factors influencing selection for leadership positions (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1997). The culturally held belief is that rational and emotional are mutually exclusive. Rational is most often a characteristic assigned to males, while emotional is assigned to females. For women to be successful superintendent candidates, an awareness of White male leadership characteristics are helpful (Brunner & Grogan 2007).

Gender consideration is defined in the context of understanding that both women and men are governed by non-conscious beliefs about gender (Valian, 1999). Each of us interprets others

performance through unacknowledged beliefs about gender differences. Valian (1999) explains that “both men and women hold the same gender *schemas* and begin acquiring them in early childhood” (p. 2). The result for our professional lives is that “men are consistently overrated, while women are underrated” (p. 2). How we perceive and treat group members, whether male, female can help us further understand the consequences of small differences in the evaluation and treatment of men and women. This concept in sociology is called the “accumulation of advantage and disadvantage” (Valian, 1999, p. 5). That is to say, advantages accrue, and even the smallest advantages accumulate. Similarly, disadvantages also accumulate.

Valian (1999) maintains that a woman and a man do not walk into a room with the same status. Women’s ideas and comments are less likely to be attended to in the same manner as a male peer. The woman then is correspondingly less likely to accumulate advantages a man might. Similarly, each time a person speaks and is ignored or discounted, disadvantages accumulate. Valian (1999) argues this is much more likely to happen to women than to men, even when the woman is more educated, and holds a higher position than a man.

Understanding gender considerations is vital for women who expect to be superintendents. The knowledge of self and others will pay high dividends; while not having that knowledge can be the downfall of an otherwise qualified candidate. Stereotypes still dominate the attitudes of school boards and even search firms whose consultants are, predictably, retired male superintendents (Tallerico, 2000). Most school boards in the United States are dominated by men. Since people tend to select candidates who are more like themselves, being a woman in a man’s world is a definite disadvantage (Tallerico, 2000).

In her work with search firms and school boards, Tallerico (2000) identifies some ways that women can stand out in the search process. The suggestions include: “stressing your leadership

ability and experience, be the first to bring up your experience with budget and your strengths in the financial arena, anticipate unasked questions and bring them up for discussion, share how all your experiences have led you to the superintendency, and show your enthusiasm, humor and desire to be collaborative” (Tallerico, 2000 p. 98).

Other areas women should be aware of are intangibles that have to do with personal character such as being able to relate to board members with ease and feeling comfortable with yourself and those around you (Tallerico, 2000). Communication with confidence is important for women. Whether it is written as part of the application process or conveyed verbally during the interview process, communicating in a clear professional manner garners positive results. Knowing the community well enough to dress with the values, social, and economic status is another way of communication that is critical for women seeking the superintendency according to Tallerico (2000).

Tallerico (2000) stresses scholarship and leadership skills as being the most important characteristics for women or men in seeking the top district position. All candidates who get to the interview table will have these qualities. Often, then it is the social-cultural skills that earn the top prize (Tallerico, 2000). Knowing gender strengths and being able to highlight these characteristics makes for a better interview and a higher chance of being that single choice when the final decision is made (Tallerico, 2000).

Deal and Kennedy (1982) assert that since the mid-eighties the movement is towards participatory management particularly in complex school systems. Marzano and Waters (2009) report a strong positive correlation between collaborative leadership styles and student achievement. In a study of eleven school districts that had successfully navigated large-scale

systemic reform, Green and Etheridge (2005) report a key factor was collaborative input from all leadership within the district.

It is clear that successful leadership does not reside solely with central administration; rather, leadership is collaborative and shared across the district among individuals who are able to facilitate attainment of vision and mission (Reeves, 2006). Leaders set the tone for whether or not collaboration occurs and continues. In fact, Marzano and Waters (2009) reason that in successful urban districts where student achievement has increased, the new leaders were sought, hired, or elected because of their inclusive leadership style. “They exhibited particular traits that facilitated participatory governance of the district which fostered collaborative working relationships among district employees, union members, and citizens” (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 24).

Marzano and Waters (2009) found in analyzing 2,714 districts there are specific leadership behaviors that impact student achievement the most. Among them:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting
  - Effective district leaders include relevant stakeholders in the goal setting process. Central office administrators, building principals and board members collaborate to reach acceptable levels of agreement on what are the nonnegotiable goals for the district. These goals are articulated throughout the district by leaders at all levels. The goals are designed around allocation of resources, achievement and instruction.
2. Establishing nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction.
  - Collaborative goals are comprised of nonnegotiable goals for instruction and student achievement. The goals are written and articulated around specific targets for the district as a whole, for individual schools and for subgroups within each school site. All staff members are aware of the goals and the action plan that operationalizes the goals.
  - The leaders within the district establish a common framework for instruction and it is the implicit and explicit responsibility of everyone to support the framework.

3. Creating board alignment with the support of district goals.
  - In effective districts, the board of education supports the established goals and ensures these goals remain top priorities. The board must consistently support the goals both privately and publicly. They must work as one body to enact actions that do not detract from the primary goals. There must be ongoing collaboration between the board of education and the superintendent.
4. Monitoring achievement and instruction goals
  - To ensure achievement and instructional goals are met, effective superintendents monitor the progress towards the goals on a continuing basis. The goals must be the driving force behind district actions. Effective superintendents support each school's goals and examine the extent to which these targets are achieved.
5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction.
  - Money, time, personnel and materials are carefully allocated to accomplish district goals in high-performing organizations. Meaningful commitment to funding must be dedicated to professional development for principals and teachers. Professional development must be targeted to building the requisite knowledge, skills and competencies teachers and principals need to accomplish district goals. Resources for professional development must be deployed at the school level and used in a way that is aligned with district achievement and instructional goals. (Marzano, & Waters, 2009, pp.6-8)

The new vision of leadership is a holistic and androgynous style (Marzano, & Waters, 2009), (Daniels, & Daniels, 2007), (Zhao, 2009). The superintendent's leadership style must be collaborative and transformational throughout goal setting, communication of the goals, knowledge of instruction and achievement goals, and allocating resources to support goals and professional development. Some researchers contend that the female style of leadership is better suited for this era of education reform (Tallerico, 2000).

Reeves (2006) explains the dimensions of leadership in *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results*. He contends there are seven dimensions for successful leadership.

These include:

- Visionary Leadership-The obligation of the leader to articulate a compelling vision and link clear standards of action that will accomplish the vision.
- Relational Leadership-...the trust and integrity that are at the foundation of any enduring relationship. Relational leaders exhibit genuine passion for their mission and the people around them.
- Systems Leadership-Systems leaders understand how all departments work together to influence student achievement.
- Reflective Leadership-Reflective leaders take time to think about the lessons learned, record their small wins and setbacks, document conflicts between values and practice, identify the difference between idiosyncratic behavior and long-term pathologies, and notice trends that emerge over time.
- Collaborative Leadership-Leverage for improved organizational performance happens through networks, not individuals. Successful leaders must acknowledge three levels of decision-making. Level I is classroom decisions made at the teachers discretion; level II decisions are collaborative, and level III are unilateral administrative decisions usually related to safety and values.
- Analytical Leaders-Analytical leaders must consider the interaction of complex variables and challenge facile and simple solutions.
- Communicative Leadership-Traditional written and oral communication skills are all part of the repertoire of an effective leader, voice mail, Web casts, and email are essential to allow a leader to communicate to a wide audience (Reeves, 2006, pp. 34-59).

C. Cryss Brunner's (2000) work with women in the superintendency shows that women typically are "thoughtful, passionate, collaborative, dedicated, and serious while able to laugh at themselves". "Women tend to use an interactive style of leadership to encourage participation" (Brunner, 2000, p. 56). This stands to reason given the career path and socialization of females in our society. Women spend an average of fifteen years in the classroom. This extensive time helps women hone communication and collaboration skills (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). More and more, the classroom is not isolated work. Teachers collaborate with their colleagues on a regular basis, and serve on parent/teacher committees, curriculum committees and leadership committees. The classroom is a fertile training ground in developing collaborative leadership skills and learning the inner workings of schools within the community (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Additionally, the literature regarding the socialization of females indicates a marked difference in how women not only act but are perceived in the workplace. Gilligan (1993), Belenky et al. (1997), and Johnson (1994) believe that socialization enhances certain behaviors that impact leadership skills and potential for future success. For example, boys are socialized to compete and win, while girls are encouraged to take turns and help each other rather than compete. Shakeshaft (1989) describes the difference in how women and men make decisions. She found that men and women arrive at decisions in very different ways. She found that women often arrive at decisions through a more inclusive participatory style than do men. This is a direct result of socially constructed gender roles (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Decision-making is a critical skill for superintendents. There are distinct differences in how women and men make decisions. Women use a more indirect approach using the influence of the group while men make decisions based on personal influence and power. Women typically have influential power based on relationships with those around them. Men enjoy positional power to a greater extent than to women. Their decisions are therefore based on that traditional power base (Haslett, 1996; Belenky et al. 1997). Social cognition of gender influence is key in moving beyond our unacknowledged bias that causes both men and women to overrate the professional skills of men and underrate the professional skills of women (Valian, 1999).

Haslett (1996) also observes that women deal with conflict very differently than men. Women tend to deal with conflict in communal ways, seeking out the group's collective opinion using strategies to smooth over problems. Men, on the other hand, emphasize individual goals and direct strategies. These differences in style have long been part of the patriarchy hegemony. It has been only in recent years that collaborative leadership style has been researched and developed in a positive way (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).



Grogan and Shakeshaft offer the most recent body of research about women's leadership style in their work, *Women and Educational Leadership* (2011). This body of research suggests several leadership characteristics are primarily behaviors associated with women. These characteristics include communication, relationships, shared decision making, and building capacity in others. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) examined fifty studies comparing male and female leadership characteristics, then, organized the data into themes. The researchers' premise is that traditional approaches to leadership have left many children behind. The conclusion then is that new leadership is needed urgently. Too many generations have not been served well with the current leadership in education. Grogan and Shakeshaft researched widely to understand the current social science theories to see whether women's approach to leadership could capitalize on some of the newer trends (Grogan, & Shakeshaft, 2011).

There are recurring themes in the study of women's leadership styles. According to the literature, women lead schools and districts purposefully. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) report there are five approaches that characterize women's educational leadership: "leadership for learning, leadership for social justice, relational leadership, and spiritual leadership" (p. 6). The regularity of use is common enough to be identified in social research (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Most women in educational leadership emphasize that they work with and through others including teachers, staff, and community members. Very few women use top down leadership to influence decisions while men are much more likely to do so. Women's leadership of districts suggests emphasis on multiple perspectives to create new solutions to problems. This is much more than seeking advice or widening the inner circle. It is a new form of collective organizational leadership that seeks ideas from around the globe (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Women leaders grasp the value of working with and learning from others. They listen more carefully and purposefully according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). “Women tend to critique options and meaningfully integrate a variety of opinions to encourage change” (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 7). New and different solutions emerge from this way of leading. Voices from the margins are included in the decision making process.

Relational leadership is powerful. That power comes from horizontal rather than hierarchical sources. Women often describe power as something that increases as it is shared. Coalition-building is critical to creating change in school systems. Networking within systems and beyond is a powerful way to bring about sustainable change according to the research of Fullan (2008) and Grogan & Shakeshaft, (2011).

Women’s leadership is motivated by social justice. Women, more often than men, choose educational careers based on social justice that is to say they believe they can have a positive impact on children’s lives. Women report they believe they make the world a fairer place through education. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) describe “fairer” as providing a more level playing field for all children. The motivation comes from a strong desire to transform lives. Women choose leadership for the same reasons. They believe they can create more equitable learning conditions for all students (Grogan, & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Another strong theme in women leaders is spiritual leadership. Women acknowledge their spirituality and the influence it has on their work. Typically, women are more willing to talk about how they use their spirituality to model behavior and inspire others. Women report the importance of their belief system, and they attribute their success and ability to push forward through conflict to the resiliency they have learned through difficulty (Grogan, & Shakeshaft, 2011). Nel Noddings’ (2003) work in ethics of caring is closely tied to spiritual leadership in

that the core of both concepts is based on putting others above self. Noddings' work distinguished between "caring for... and caring about..." (Noddings, 2003). Both are part of spiritual leadership.

Leadership for learning is a strong characteristic in women leaders. The research of Brunner and Grogan (2007) and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) shows women in educational leadership positions introduce and strongly support staff development. Putting instruction and learning at the center of their vision for school districts is much more common in women superintendents than in their male peers (Grogan, & Shakeshaft, 2011). The changes women introduce to their organizations are typically related to learning. This is likely due to the longer periods of time they have spent in the classroom compared to the time men spend in the classroom before moving to the superintendency (Brunner, & Grogan, 2007).

Balanced leadership is another theme Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) describe as characteristic of women in leadership positions. These authors describe balanced leadership as a balance between work, home, and community commitments. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) reference the work of Coleman, 2002; Curry, 2000; Dillard 2006; Grogan 1996 and others in describing how women must balance home and work more so than men. Typically, men have work commitments and some community commitments that are work related. Women on the other hand, put in 8-12 hour days as district leaders then go home to childcare and household responsibilities. Often, women also do much community work through church and civic organizations that support children (Brunner, & Grogan, 2010).

Achieving balance allows women leaders to focus their energy effectively and efficiently in each area. Given the history of women's responsibilities for keeping the family viable by taking on whatever responsibilities necessary, balanced leadership is not as big a challenge as it might

appear. Throughout the lives of women, balance becomes a survival skill. Most women spend much more of their careers in the classroom balancing the responsibilities of the classroom with mothering young children. They become involved in civic organizations and church groups as part of being a member of the community. By the time a woman moves to district level leadership, the balancing strategies are already in place (Jordan, Hunter, & Derrick, 2008).

Rhodes (2003) suggests one reason for the long delay in women taking on the superintendency is “not as much a difference for leadership style as how leadership traits are used” (p. 15). There are some emerging themes in traits attributed to women. These themes are identified in the research of Tom Peters (2004) as collegial, intense, nurturing and intrinsically motivated. Women tend to display these traits through focused relationship building, emphasis on the importance of communication, and inclusion of all stakeholders.

The brain research seems to indicate a significant difference between the male and female brain. Learning, thinking, communication, attention, gross, and fine motor skills are all markedly different in men and women. Some believe the difference in the male and female brain comes from socialization rather than natural differences (Gilligan, 1982). There is evidence from medical research that indicates the marked differences are present at birth and may very well be related to hormones rather than socialization. It is likely a combination of both nature and nurture (Rosenthal, 2000).

What this means to women leaders is that they go about business in a different way. Given that communication skills are more likely to be a strength, women then are more likely to approach leadership through the lens of communication with others. Relationships seem to be a strength found in women more so than in men. When looking at women leaders, the evidence

shows collaborative, social, and communication strategies as strengths much more often than in men leaders (Rosenthal, 2000).

In *Ladies Who Lead Voices of Authentic Character: Women in the Role of School Superintendent* (2008), Jordan, Hunter and Derrick share that the superintendents they interviewed had many common characteristics including; “dedication, relationship building, humor, passion, a sense of integrity and authenticity” (p. 36). The authors interviewed eight Virginia superintendents, from 2004-2007. They set about looking for common themes or characteristics of these women superintendents in that state. The authors used a qualitative methodological approach in their ethnographic study.

All the participants in the study were asked the same questions and each was given the opportunity to expand their answers. Each of the eight participants also filled out a questionnaire and this was followed up with phone conversations and emails to clarify information. An analysis of the interviews, the questionnaires, and the follow-up information was conducted. The authors uncovered common themes that ran through the lived experiences of these ladies (Jordan, et al., 2008).

The themes were clustered into six categories and are not unlike those discussed in Brunner and Shakeshaft’s work, *Women in Educational Leadership* (2011). Jordan, et al. categorize the themes into these areas: “passion & energy: dedication, persistence & commitment, relationship building & compassion, integrity, authenticity & honesty, sense of humor & humility, good to great (more an attitude than a book)” (Jordan, et al., 2008, pp. 37-38).

Passion and energy are described as being traits that include little patience for slackers because these superintendents feel the urgency to improve student learning. These superintendents reported that they went to work early, stayed late, and worked weekends. They

did not look to the clock to determine when the work began or ended. Instead, they worked whatever hours were needed to complete the work at hand. The eight superintendents reported that they chose to surround themselves with others who also were energetic and passionate (Jordan, et al., 2008).

Dedication, persistence, and commitment can be explained by devotion to the well-being and achievement of children in their districts. They did not see barriers, only challenges that could be met with diligence. Each of the superintendents reported challenges they faced as opportunities to bring about positive change. Just to be hired into a position that is dominated by men was a challenge they each faced and overcame with great success (Jordan, et al., 2008).

Relationship building and compassion in combination is a theme considered to be the affective side of leadership, key in bring about positive change for student learning. Working with staff, listening to ideas and opinions, and being available to talk with parents, teachers, principals, and community members was paramount in creating trusting relationships. Being transparent about beliefs and compassionate for the challenges others face helped these superintendents to be successful in their districts (Jordan, et al., 2008).

Integrity, authenticity, and honesty, include making ethical decisions and doing what is right for the right reasons was a theme described as integral to successful leadership. One participant of the study describes it this way: “I believe the integrity of my intent, which was to improve the quality of education for all the children for the commonwealth” (Jordan, et al. 2008, p. 219). Authenticity has to do with the superintendent’s personal agenda. If there is any indication that she (the superintendent) has a hidden agenda for the district, then there is no authenticity. Taking on the school district as it is and working with groups to determine what is needed for improvement is considered authentic, according to these authors (Jordan, et al., 2008).

Sense of humor and humility are mentioned as an additional theme for successful women in the superintendency. Examples of “not taking yourself too seriously” (Jordan, et al., 2008 p. 219) were given by all eight of the subjects studied. Being able to poke fun at oneself and being able to admit mistakes apologize when necessary and move on were threads that came through as strong components of success. Jordan, et al., (2008) report that laughter permeated their interviews with the women they studied. Each had interesting stories to share and many shared some of their major mistakes.

“Good to Great (more of an attitude than a book)” was the sixth theme the authors identified in their study (Jordan, et al., 2008). Not only was Collin’s book *Good to Great* (2001) identified by most of the ladies in the study, but it was a belief in taking the steps necessary to move from good to great. Having the attitude of continuous improvement and embracing whatever it takes to get better was a strong common attitude among the participants. One participant described leadership with this statement: “... my answer to leadership is: if you can build the people under you to be great leaders, then you yourself are the great leader because if you leave, the place can still go on” (Collins, 2001, p. 220).

In *Ladies Who Lead Voices of Authentic Character: Women in the Role of the Superintendent*, Jordan et al. (2008) examined the professional lives of eight working superintendents in Virginia. These female superintendents represented a range from rural districts to urban districts and included the state superintendent for public instruction in Virginia. Some of the ladies were new to the superintendency, while others had years of experience. There were few other commonalities among the women other than they were superintendents in Virginia. The authors’ findings supported by the work of Brunner and Grogan (2007) established six common themes.

There are a number of other published studies that find common attributes or themes in women who lead school districts. Brunner and Grogan studied women superintendents and shared their work in *Women Leading School Systems* (2007). They chose to do a common profile of the women they studied.

They share a profile of women superintendents that identifies career paths, approaches to leadership, how women navigate the system, and satisfaction perceptions. Brunner and Grogan (2007) begin by stating that “the superintendency is one of the most masculinized roles in our culture with more than 80% of current superintendents being male” (p. 28). With that in mind, how then do women navigate the system? Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that women typically do not begin their careers in teaching with the mindset of becoming a superintendent. Instead, women become teachers to have a positive impact on the lives of children.

Women typically spend about fifteen years as teachers before moving to building leader or curriculum leader positions. They choose to be principals or curriculum leaders to have a greater impact on student learning. The women in Brunner and Grogan’s study reported similar aspirations and motivation for the superintendency as Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) did in studying women district leaders. They saw how their work was critical to school improvement and felt the next layer of leadership, (the superintendency) would give them more power to make changes and support the work of teaching and learning. This was generally true for both the superintendent group and those who aspired to the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

All three groups studied (superintendents, those who aspire to the superintendency, and those who did not) reported they had mentors who supported and pushed them towards leadership positions. Some of the mentors were other women in leadership positions but many were male colleagues who guided and advised these women through the system. The groups all



agreed that mentoring was critical in their leadership growth and helped them navigate the system to attain roles that suited their aptitude and talent. Mentors were credited with helping these successful women expand their leadership skills (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Even with great mentors and extensive education in administration and supervision, 60% of assistant/associate/deputy superintendents considered their options and decided to remain in their central office positions rather than take on the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

These women found their work satisfying and were not interested in the challenge of overcoming the barriers women find in seeking the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). The barriers cited included the continued “old boy network”, the fact that relocating was a factor in about half those studied, the political and sexist nature of superintendent searches, and the perception that administrative and managerial interests were a bigger part of the superintendency than curriculum and instruction. Even with these barriers, a majority of the non-aspiring group cited that they could succeed in not only acquiring the top district spot but could be successful in the position. They simply felt content where they were and felt the impact they had in their current position was best suited for them (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

On the other hand, women who aspired to the superintendency acknowledged the barriers and saw them as challenges to be met. These women reported that while they did feel a great sense of success in their current positions, they felt they could have an even greater impact on the entire school system if they moved into the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Jordan et al., (2008) report the same characteristic in the women superintendents they studied.

Additionally, both studies reported that women, more than men, describe the many challenges of the superintendency and making a difference in the lives of children as motivating factors in seeking the district’s highest position.

Among the not aspiring group, the aspiring group and those who were superintendents, there was strong agreement about the knowledge and skills that helped them advance in their careers. They reported interpersonal skills, responsiveness to parents and community groups, the ability to maintain organizational relationships, emphasis on improved instruction, and knowledge of curriculum and instruction as very highest level (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

These skills reported were developed through the formal education setting. Almost half (49%) of the respondents in the study reported having an EdD or a PhD. Most (68%) had a superintendent certificate. In addition, Brunner and Grogan (2007) reported that 80% of the women in their study reported having extensive non-university professional development most often provided by the many professional organizations in which they held memberships. These professional organizations included the Association of Curriculum Development (ASCD), the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), Phi Delta Kappa, and state and local affiliates. Much of the professional development comes from state and national conferences sponsored by these organizations (Burnner, & Grogan, 2007).

Most of the women in the study read professional journals on a regular basis. The journals cited in the study included: *Educational Leadership*, *The School Administrator*, *American School Board Journal*, and *Education Week*. The women reported reading professional books in addition to the various journals. All of these supported their growth in leadership, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and other current issues in educational administration (Burnner & Grogan, 2007).

Brunner and Grogan (2007) report that women and men superintendents join similar professional organizations. ASCD is more popular among women and AASA is slightly more popular with men. Both men and women took advantage of the professional development

opportunities provided by the organizations. Women, however, were more likely to join the organizations and take advantage of the learning opportunities long before acquiring a superintendent position.

In *Women Leading School Systems*, Brunner and Grogan (2007) indicate that women are “making a name for themselves as superintendents today” (p. 153). School boards seek candidates that have skills and knowledge in curriculum and instruction, interpersonal skills, and the ability to build capacity within the community. More and more boards are seeing that the experience women have fits this prerequisite list.

Gupton and Slick studied women superintendents in their 1996 study, *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Stories of How They Got There*. A comparison can be made between this body of work and the work that Brunner and Grogan (2007), and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) have done since 1996. Interestingly, what it takes to be a successful superintendent as reported by Gupton and Slick (1996) has not changed much. In this study of fifteen women leaders, the authors conclude there are five commonalities. Among these common characteristics are:

- Cultivate the desire to succeed
- Learn how to be comfortable with pursuing power
- Use your “participatory” leadership style
- Broaden your educational qualifications
- Develop networking and mentoring skills. (pp. 150-151)

From these commonalities, the authors go into depth in explaining the eight lessons learned by the fifteen district leaders. These align with later studies that profile or define themes among women superintendents (Brunner and Grogan, 2007). Their work also aligns with the cultural stereotypes women face when stepping into leadership positions. Their work is based on the literature of the 1980s and 1990s along with in-depth interviews and questions with 15 women

school leaders. Both the literature review and the experiences shared by the subjects of the study converge with many stereotypes women must overcome as they move through the ranks of school leadership (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

Gupton and Slick (1996) identified several stereotypes they questioned their respondents about as they conducted interviews. Among the stereotypes discussed were:

- Women are perceived to be less powerful on the job than men
- Women are more sensitive to people matters than men
- Women are not as effective in their decision-making as men
- Women are incapable of financial finesse
- Women are more people-oriented than men
- Women lack political savvy
- Women are not good mediators. (p. 116)

In spite of bucking up against stereotypes that challenged the women in the study, they continued on and became successful. As part of the study, an analysis of their “lessons” of success is shared. Even though this study is fifteen years old, current work bears out the resilience of this work. The lessons discussed in *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Stories of How They Got There* (Gupton & Slick, 1996) are as true today as they were then, according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). Gupton and Slick (1996) discuss how the participants successfully fight against system-wide practices that perpetuate the status quo.

The first of these lessons is “be prepared”. The respondents in Gupton and Slick’s (1996) study report that they had to be well prepared with the necessary degrees and credentials that qualified them for the position they sought. One respondent reported, “throughout my career I have been hampered by the lack of degree, not the lack of skills or experience” (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 5). The research shows that women in the highest level of district administration are much more likely to have a doctorate than are their male counterparts. Women with the desire and skills to take on the superintendency must have the professional credentials (Gupton & Slick,

1996). In addition, women who aspire to the superintendency must be prepared to take on challenges others might shy away from (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Personal sacrifice is inevitable; be prepared to sacrifice family and personal time, advise Gupton and Slick (1996).

Preparedness includes professional development and self-directed study. The women in this study belonged to professional organizations, attended conferences, and read books on leadership, curriculum, instruction, and finance (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Being more prepared than men candidates for administrative positions was a common piece of advice the fifteen subjects of this study shared (Gupton & Slick, 1996). These administrators also advised those aspiring to the superintendency to “study, study, study” (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 150).

Gupton and Slick (1996) advised developing political awareness: “If an administrator is not politically astute, all may be lost, including the administrator’s position in the district”, (p. 3). Some of subjects in this study share stories of job loss because of their political naïveté (Gupton & Slick, 1996). “Find out who is in power and is most influential in making promotions, and then make sure that person knows you and your accomplishment,” one respondent advised. Another respondent recommended, “Know the power bases in the organization and the community”, (p. 4). All fifteen advised women to watch, listen and be aware of the political climate (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

The second lesson in this study is “plan for your career”, advise Gupton and Slick (1996, p. 10). This lesson was loud and clear from all the women. These women told common stories of doing more planning for their spouse’s career than for their own. They did not really plan until they were well into their 40s and 50s. All the participants counsel women to plan and dream big. They warn women to put in the extra time and never hesitate to do jobs men won’t do so that you

gain knowledge of the organization. This knowledge will provide dividends throughout one's career (Gupton, & Slick, 1996).

This study portrays women who may not have begun their educational careers with the superintendency in mind but through experiences and challenges, the respondents came to the place where they had a dream to fulfill (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Often, they had to plan and strategize to move their careers forward. Looking back, they all wished they had done this much earlier in their lives (Gupton, & Slick, 1996).

Lesson three is persevering. "If anyone is truly interested in how I made it to a top-level position in education, it is simply because of perseverance" (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 28). Perseverance was high on the list of lessons for all fifteen of the respondents. Common quotes include:

"Don't give up! Keep pushing for the position you'd like to have."

"Realize that failure is a necessary step to moving forward."

"Go that second, third, and ...mile."

"Keep trying. Don't accept the first two No's." (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 28)

The respondents in this study disclosed many barriers they encountered in their ascension to the top in school administration. Among the barriers were limitations to move to a community where more opportunities were available because of family obligations, primarily the job of a spouse (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Mobility issues also included community and the child obligation. Some respondents found money to complete degrees necessary to reach a district level position difficult to come by (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Most of the women completed master's level and doctorate degrees with scholarships and assistantships at universities (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

Other barriers included "the old boys' network". The women shared tales of being the most highly qualified candidate for district level positions but the job often went to a male coach

or high school principal with no district level experience. Little has changed in fifteen years according to the more recent work of Brunner and Shakeshaft (2011).

Lesson four is described by Gupton and Slick (1996) as diligence and professionalism. “Work hard and be qualified” (p. 10) were frequent remarks by the women leaders the authors studied. The women shared the common experiences of going to work early, hours before others and staying long after regular hours. They regularly took work home to stay ahead of their responsibilities. Several of the women shared that they did not take sick days or vacation days. They felt they had to work hard and show unwavering dedication to the district to earn the respect of their colleagues (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

Diligence went along with professionalism in that the women in this study reported working hard to show their absolute and steadfast integrity (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Integrity was an essential characteristic as illustrated in the comments of the women studied. These comments ranged from “courage and integrity are hallmarks of real leaders, never compromise your principles, be honest,” to “keep a professional, dedicated, positive attitude”, (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 49). Several stories were retold by the author that demonstrated the critical nature of integrity, honesty, and several included sense of humor (Gupton, & Slick, 1996).

Again, these lessons ring true years later in the more current studies of women superintendents (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Some characteristics of outstanding leadership are timeless. Professionalism and diligence are two strong characteristics that likely will remain at the top of leaders’ lists.

The fifth lesson the authors detail is “honor, preserve, and protect your integrity”, (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 56). This lesson can sometimes be, as one respondent describes, “counter-cultural in some situations but surviving takes skill,” (Gupton & Slick, 1996, p. 57). The women

in this study refused to sacrifice their integrity, honesty, and personal reputation to survive a particular unpopular challenge. Honor means holding principles of honesty, respect, dignity, and doing what you say you will do. Each of the women in this study relay stories of this lesson as they moved through the ranks to the district level. They all describe challenges when the nature of certain situations made others abandon these characteristics but they held on to them with all their strength (Gupton, & Slick, 1996)

Lesson six is to reach out to and through others. The work of Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), and Grogan and Brunner (2007) indicate that developing a mentoring relationship is critical to success at the district level. Each of the authors who study leadership advises women to identify not just one mentor but several who can advise them. Like Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), Gupton and Slick (1996) noted the significance of networking with and through professional organizations. These organizations connect women with powerbrokers on a state and national basis. If a woman wants to move into the top level positions, she must know how to reach out and through others (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

Gupton and Slick (1996) explain that lesson seven is closely tied to lesson six; “practice what you seek, the importance of mentoring” (p 90). This, simply put, is caring about others enough to provide information to those who need it. Building support systems for other women administrators through mentorships creates an environment where everyone can be successful. Each of the women in this study share stories of the many people who mentored them through building level and district level positions. A mentor is defined as, “one with whom you form a professional, interpersonal relationship and who provides beneficial career and psychosocial support to you” (Gupton, & Slick, 1996, pp. 90-92).



The eighth lesson is to “lead by example” (Gupton & Slick 1996, p. 108). Gupton and Slick (1996) explain that the very leadership skills attributed to women, such as, shared decision-making, relationship building, collaboration, nurturing others, and the knowledge of curriculum and instruction, all serve to reform systems that are broken (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Exhibit the characteristics you want to see in others. Lead by sharing leadership, is advice shared by the fifteen women in this study (Gupton, & Slick, 1996).

In their study *Highly Successful Women Administrators: The Inside Stories of How They Got There*, Gupton and Slick (1996) conclude with some expert guidance for their readers. The authors call for more research focused on women leaders, more scholarly discussion about encouraging women to go for the advanced degrees that will qualify them for district level positions, and a fundamental shift from access to equity in district level positions. Since this work was published in 1996, the number of women in high level positions including assistant/associate/deputy superintendent and the superintendency has just about doubled. Still, the numbers are very low compared to the number of women in education. There are significantly more women either in advanced degree programs or with advanced degrees poised to take district level slots.

The final advice the authors give echoes what their fifteen subjects suggest, “Go for it” (Gupton, & Slick, 1996, p. 147). This message is overwhelmingly consistent not just in this study but in all the studies of women in superintendent positions done in subsequent years by Grogan and Brunner (2007) and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011). There are programs, organizations and mentors ready and willing to support good, hardworking, knowledgeable women who aspire to the top levels in district administration.

In 1999, C. Cyrss Brunner, assistant professor of educational administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, edited *Sacred Dreams: Women and the Superintendency*. This collection of scholarly studies by thirteen researchers includes an array of topics about women and the superintendency. The topics are summarized in chapters, grouped into overarching themes. The study begins with a forward written by Cyrss Brunner (1999) asserting the importance of in-depth investigation into the challenges women face in aspiring to the superintendency as well as the challenges women face when they reach the position. This study includes the additional and unique barriers Black and Hispanic women encounter.

Jackie Blount (1998) begins her study, *Destined to Rule: Women in the Superintendency 1873-1995*, with a condensed history of women who were elected to the superintendency and the push for the appointive system. She asserts that early in the century there was cause for great optimism. In these early years, nearly 28 percent of county superintendents were women. These were typically elected positions. Many women retain their positions for an extended period of time, sometimes for as long as twelve years (Blount, 1998). Blount reports that as the push to make county superintendencies appointed positions rather than elected ones, the tenure of women faded dramatically. In the decades following 1935, the number of women in top county positions dwindled to one percent (Blount, 1998).

Marilyn Tallerico (2000) expands on women in the superintendency in her review of more recent statistics. She found that the representation of women in school district administration is abysmal when compared to the number of women in business top management positions. Tallerico's (2000) work parallels the work of Valian (1999). Valian (1999) describes the difficulty women face in district administration as "hypothesis confirmation" (p. 167). That is to say, the sheer number of White men in top leadership positions causes both men and women to

associate success in terms of White male characteristics (Valian, 1999). Tallerico (2000) on the other hand, identifies a profile of women who have made it. This profile includes such traits as wanting to make a difference in children's lives, creating change, working with people, and supporting change at the district level.

Tallerico (2000) describes the women she studied as "persistent, hopeful, determined to push the limits" to obtain the position they desired. Brunner, Blount, Tallerico, Kamler, Shakeshaft, Alston, and Ortiz, (1999) confirm Tallerico's findings. Brunner, et al. (1999) report that women either directly or indirectly bump up against the male dominated role expectations of the superintendency or best known as the "good old boys network". The researcher found that women identified mobility as an obstacle to their aspirations. The gatekeepers of the superintendency, the search firms and school boards are often not willing to look at women candidates if qualified men are available, even when the women were better qualified (Tallerico, 2000).

Feminine leadership attributes Tallerico (2000) noted were "nurturance, supportiveness, caring, attention to relationships, collaboration and the desire to make changes to enhance the lives of children", (p. 32). These attributes align with the findings of later researchers.

Cryss Brunner (2000) contributes chapters three and four of this study with her topic of study superintendent selection. Understanding this process is essential in understanding the lack of female representation at the superintendent level. School boards sometimes do their own search but most often hire a search firm either private or part of the state school board association. Both avenues present the same kinds of barriers for women. Typically, board members are male middle class citizens who see the world through conservative eyes. The middle class values male leadership more than female leadership (Brunner et al., 1999). Valian

(1999) confirms this in her study, *Why So Slow: The Advancement of Women*. Valian (1999) explains that patriarchy hegemony is embedded in our society at every level.

Search firms by definition are “gatekeepers” to the superintendency. Search firms are typically made up of retired superintendents and college professors. Grogan and Shakeshaft reported that on average, 30-50 percent of search consultants are retired superintendents and are predominantly male (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). College professors also make up a large proportion of search consultants, again predominantly male. When Grogan and Shakeshaft (1999) studied search firms, they found that consultants didn’t actively recruit qualified female candidates. These researchers interviewed both male and female search consultants and found few women apply for the superintendency.

Consultants who had ten or more years’ experience conducting searches offered some of their experiences related to female candidates. Some consultants reported very few qualified female candidates applied. Some search consultants reported that the expectations of school boards were that candidates would have experience as high school principals. Few women fit that expectation since men dominate the high school principalship (Grogan, & Shakeshaft, 1999). The high school principalship has long been considered a requirement for the superintendency because it is such a complex leadership position. High school principals must lead large staffs, manage a unique microcosm of students, manage numerous activities, and a budget that is second only to that of the district as a whole. Proof of these skills, in the minds of boards and search consultants, comes from successfully leading a high school. Valian (1999) illustrates these findings with the explanation of gender based interpretations of success and failure. Society has assigned success characteristics to, in this case, the high school principalship and less successful characteristics to elementary and middle school principalships.

Women typically come from the ranks of elementary school teachers then go into the elementary principal position followed by central office work in curriculum and instruction. Search consultants report that the number of qualified applicants for the superintendency for elementary school districts is significantly higher than for K-12 districts (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). The search consultants believe that there is a comfort level for women at the elementary level (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Interestingly, this is a “chicken or the egg” discussion since history does not offer many K-12 women superintendents to be role models. Additionally, in a White male middle class culture, women tend to move into positions where they know they will be successful and supported (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Women often have not had role models, mentors, or support in seeking the superintendency. In addition, Valian (1999) articulates similar findings with “some women, faced with a clear picture of their personal situation devalue the field they originally aspired to and relinquish their high aspirations” (p. 165).

Search consultants also reported that boards often list experience in the superintendent position as a prerequisite for candidates (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Fewer women have held the position required to get the experiences, therefore, are left out by this qualifier alone. Women often stop competing for superintendent positions after three or four failed attempts (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Valian (1999) contends that the interpretation of success and failure are gender-based. Male success in professional positions is overvalued and their failures are underestimated, while females’ success is undervalued and failures are overestimated (Valian, 1999).

The search consultants were asked about their experience with boards in including women in the final candidate pool. Several reported they actively recruited women while others reported

they felt led by the boards to seek specific qualities and often these did not support recruiting women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Some search consultants summed up their experience with community and boards this way:

...there are myths about women...women are too emotional and can't see things rationally and so that affects their decision-making. The other thing is that women are nurturers to a greater extent than men are. That doesn't sit well in the superintendency; we {superintendents} have to make these tough decisions...women are not as strong in dealing with the major issues as men would be (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999, p. 118).

Even when women apply and have experience, there are still cultural beliefs that stand in the way of women getting into the superintendency.

Consultants that have been in the search business a long time report women apply for their first superintendent position when they are in their mid-fifties. Boards of Education most often have someone younger in mind. School boards and consultants alike believe educators in their mid-fifties and beyond are poised to retire and boards are looking for superintendents that will stay five or more years (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Boards report that if they hire women in their mid to late fifties, they will be looking for another superintendent in a couple of years (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). One experienced consultant put it this way:

Many of the females had been teaching fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years, so they were very experienced teachers—senior-type persons. At fifty-five or sixty, they're out looking for a superintendency when the males were retiring at fifty-five, and so it was difficult for them to get jobs. The board's looking {to replace} somebody who is retiring at fifty-five and women who were applying for the job were fifty-eight and had never been a superintendent. Board members were saying, 'Well, wait a minute'... (Grogan, & Shakeshaft 1999, p. 56).

Age and gender bias both play a significant role in whether women are in the finalist pool of candidates for superintendent positions. When you add in the high school principal prerequisite, the stereotypes that women are more nurturing and thus less able to make difficult decisions, and the bias that women are not as capable as men when it comes to financial issues, the deck is

stacked considerably against women (Jordan, Hunter, Derrick, 2008). All too often women reach central office positions and decide that is where they are most comfortable, the place they can have the most substantial impact on student achievement, so they stay in positions as directors and assistant superintendents (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 1999). Valian (1999) supports these findings in *Why So Slow?: The Advancement of Women*. She argues that there is an accumulation of advantages and disadvantages, and regardless of how minor the individual acts of bias, they add up to major inequalities (Valian, 1999).

Conversely, women who have made the choice to pursue the superintendency and realize their dream, report high levels of satisfaction with their jobs (Jordan, et al., 2008). Women in the superintendency describe their work in terms of themes according to Jordan, et al., (2008). The themes include: passion and energy; dedication, persistence and commitment; relationship building and compassion; integrity, authenticity and honesty; sense of humor and humility; and good to great, (more of an attitude than a book (Jordan, et al., 2008, p. 217).

Passion and energy are described as two qualities that go hand and hand in the superintendency. Passion for building a dynamic learning organization where students achieve at high levels takes unceasing energy according to the ladies Jordan, et al., (2008) studied. These ladies went to work early, stayed late, and involved themselves in the community. They had little patience for “slackers”. They surrounded themselves with others who were passionate about their work and had the energy to do whatever it took to succeed (Jordan, et al., 2008).

Connected closely with passion and energy were dedication, persistence, and commitment, the next qualities the authors identified in their study. The authors define dedication, persistence and commitment as being able to overcome whatever challenges stand in the way of the well-being of children. The ladies studied saw barriers as learning opportunities and challenges that

had to be met to ensure the best education and opportunities for students. Jordan, Hunter and Derrick reported, “Each found a way to get around the barrier, to overcome the barrier or to learn from it and turn it into a positive situation” (Jordan, et al., 2008, p. 218).

Relationship building and compassion were the affective side of successful leadership qualities according to the respondents in the Jordan, et al., (2008) study. Caring for others was a critical piece in moving an organization towards the vision they had set. Having compassion and knowledge of those they serve was paramount in building consensus. The women in this study gave examples of being available to parents and staff, of visiting school buildings on a regular basis, and taking the time to talk to teachers on an individual basis. Each of the ladies gave examples of how building relationships and having compassion for those around them made a significant difference in their leadership success.

“Making ethical decisions, doing what is right for the right reasons was considered an integral part of leadership,” by the women in the study (Jordan, et al., 2008, p. 219) The authors categorized these qualities as integrity, authenticity, and honesty. Jordan, et al., (2008) quoted one superintendent as saying “the people you work with must trust you and the decisions you make in order to follow your lead” (p. 219). “The sense of autonomy and independent self-directed thought are key to leadership.” (Jordan, et al., 2008, p. 219)

Sense of humor and humility was a strong theme Jordan, et al., (2008) identified in the group they studied. The authors describe stories each of the ladies told that showed great humor and humility. The ladies were able to poke fun at themselves and their mistakes. They did not take themselves too seriously but did take their work seriously. They saw themselves as being able to make mistakes and apologize. They were willing to share even their most embarrassing errors and laugh about them.



The final theme is good to great, “*more an attitude than a book*”. While each of the ladies in the study identified Collin’s book *Good to Great* as a favorite book, they recognized that they must be learners themselves. They must know and do whatever it takes to be great. Each of the ladies embraced the notion of excellence. They have dedicated their lives and careers to moving beyond “good”. One respondent put it this way, “And as a leader, my answer to leadership is: if you can build the people under you to be great leaders then you yourself are a great leader because if you leave, then the place can go on” (Jordan, et al., 2008, p. 220). Each superintendent in this study embraced the idea going beyond and not settling for “good”.

Gender considerations are key in studying leadership in school districts. Women lead differently than men (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Women have a different set of experiences, a different set of expectations and different ways of going about the business of leadership. There are identifiable perceptions through which women define their personal and professional experiences. The work reviewed in this section discusses the themes and ideas that express those experiences in leadership. On the whole, when these leadership for change themes are generalized, they fit in to what others, including Marzano and Waters (2009) and Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), have articulated through their research.

### **Summary**

This literature review provided a historical perspective of women in the superintendency and the challenges of leadership and change in urban districts. Urban education has major challenges that call for refined, specific leadership and change skills. This chapter discussed related women’s issues within the context of the superintendency. While women constitute a majority of school employees, hold more master’s degrees and doctorates, few reach the apex of school

administration. They have limited access to the superintendency. This chapter sheds light on why this occurs.

The theoretical framework for this study is discussed at length. Feminist critical theory is the lens through which the experiences of the participants will be viewed. Feminist critical theory allows the researcher to treat gender as a conceptual or analytical category. Women are treated differently than men, according to Marshall (1997), Valian (1999) and others. Looking at how this scheme affects women's narratives is critical to this study.

Leadership theory is discussed with a concentration of the work of Reeves and Marzano. The discussion of change theory focused on the work of Fullan and Reeves, with the framework for thinking about systems change designed by Knoster, Villa and Thousand. Each of these components was examined through the lens of critical feminist theory.

The literature shows women have, and continue to face, remarkable challenges in getting top leadership positions in school districts. The history of women in education shows women hold an overwhelming number of lower level positions but have great difficulty in moving into leadership positions even when they are equally credentialed and better educated than their male counterparts.

Change theory is discussed in this chapter as it pertains to leadership. The research of Fullan (2009) and Knoster, Vila, and Thousand (2000) indicate there are change attributes that have a higher degree of leverage when used in concert with leadership skills. Fullan (2005) addresses the use of the attributes discussed in this chapter as "vital to sustainability".

The intersection of gender, leadership, and change in the literature is discussed. A close look at the literature shows that there are many women well prepared to take on the top positions of America's top district spots. Still, there are many gender related issues that stand in the way.

This study will look at what principles of change influence the leadership skill set women used. Previous studies show that accessing the superintendency is different for women than it is for men (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009). Women seem to have a tougher time not only accessing the superintendency, but accessing leadership roles that have been typically, prerequisites to the superintendency. This background is forms a foundation for understanding leadership for change skills needed for urban superintendents.

Previous studies show that accessing the superintendency is different for women than it is for men (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009). Women seem to have a tougher time not only accessing the superintendency, but accessing leadership roles that have been typically, prerequisites to the superintendency. Understanding this background knowledge is germane to this study because it establishes a foundation for the leadership for change skills so desperately needed in the urban superintendency.

In the next chapter, the details for using a qualitative approach to study the challenges some of the women who successfully lead large urban school districts are outlined. Additionally, the outline of the research design is discussed. Chapter three also offers a description of the population studied, the criteria used for selection of participants, the purposeful sampling, and the role of the researcher. Finally, the interview protocol, data analysis, and overall ethical considerations are explained.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this multi-case study was to investigate the challenges encountered by selected women superintendents who lead urban school districts successfully. The researcher specifically looked at challenges women face as they navigate leadership and change to bring about improved student achievement. The structure of this study was heavily influenced by the constructs of change theory and leadership theory through the lens of feminist critical theory.

This study was designed around the following research sub questions:

### **Research Sub Questions**

1. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' practices from a leadership perspective?
2. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' use of change theory practices for improving student achievement?
3. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenges participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency?

These sub questions were designed to answer the main research question.

### **Main Research Question**

The over-arching research question for this study was: What patterns exist in the perceptions of urban female superintendents with respect to the challenges of leadership and change?

This chapter describes the qualitative research method, the process for participant selection, sampling strategy, the participants, data collection, descriptions of participants, data analysis, background, and role of the researcher, validation strategies, and ethical considerations.

## Qualitative Research Method

“Writers agree that one undertakes qualitative research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (Creswell, 1998, p. 14). The nature and depth of this study called for qualitative research to understand the detailed information involved in the experiences of women who are successful urban superintendents in this country. “Qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2). The number of women superintendents continues to be few; therefore qualitative research is appropriate to ensure the experiences of the underrepresented are recognized. With the more traditional quantitative method of investigation, individual voices are lost. When people share the meaning of their common values and experiences, richness emerges that will serve others who follow in their footsteps (Kratwohl, 1998).

This study focused on five women who are superintendents in urban school districts. It specifically focused on the shared experiences and challenges of leadership and change these women traverse to bring about growth in student achievement. The data reveal the complex stories with many variables. These variables of choice, professional experience, age, and personal history were considered. The holistic nature of this study and the inductive logic used was an effort to share the complex human experiences and the dynamic contexts in which these women live (Stake, 1995).

Qualitative research design approaches include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2007). This researcher selected multi-case study to gain a comprehensive understanding and meaning of the information collected. Multi-case

study provides a more inclusive process to identify common themes among the few women urban superintendents. The nature of a single case study would not allow for the analysis of commonalities. The data tell a story of the lived experiences of the five participants. The researcher looked at the information holistically to determine common patterns of experiences revealed by the participants.

### **Research Design-Process for Participant Selection**

Both quantitative and qualitative researchers cast a wide net to capture the frequencies or themes that explain the state of being that is being studied (Stake, 1995). In this multi-case study, the researcher cast the net to know extensively and intensively about five women who served as urban school superintendents. The researcher sought to understand and articulate the common challenges selected women urban superintendents face. Fourteen women met the criteria of serving in an urban school district and were members of the Council of Great City Schools. Five of the fourteen women did not meet the criteria of serving in their current district for at least three years. Nine women met all three criteria. The researcher contacted each of the nine. Five of the fourteen women consented to participate in the study. Of the remaining four, two responded via email that they did not have time to participate. The researcher did not receive a response from the final two superintendents who met all three criteria.

This multi-case study drew on multiple sources of information rich in context. The data collection was extensive. Multiple sources of information such as vitas, biographies, district news information, and other documents available on reliable public websites were examined for context and to assist with interpretation of the data. Context also allows insights, and helped illuminate meaning for the reader. The set of two interviews with each participant provided

individual perceptions of leadership and change. The interviews were coded; patterns and themes were further identified and developed.

The multi-case study is bound by place, in this case, the Council of Great City Schools, and by time, the spring and summer of 2012 (Stake, 1995). This study was bound by the time practitioners' had available to participate in a set of two interviews and review feedback.

Thorough data were collected to support a comprehensive description of the cases to understand processes, events, and context characteristics of the women studied. Case study research is anchored in real life situations, thereby providing rich, holistic accounts of a particular phenomenon. "Good case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view" (Stake, 1995, p. 13). A systematic exploration of each case was the intent here. There was no way to predict what, if anything may be generalized to a particular population. However, the results of this study do contribute to the research on women superintendents in the urban setting.

### **Background**

A deep history of patriarchal hegemony in educational leadership exists, particularly in the office of superintendent. The challenges of the urban superintendent to increase student achievement along with all the other duties assigned to the position, make success nearly unattainable. Remarkably, there were women who have shattered the "glass ceiling" in urban school districts and led change to bring about growth in student achievement. This study is about some of them. Each woman was the superintendent of an urban school district whose district was a member of the Council of Great City Schools, has at least three years' experience in her current position, and had shown growth in student achievement.

There are sixty-five urban school districts who are members of the Council of Great City Schools (2011). The Council of Great City Schools is a professional organization that provides

professional development, research and advocacy for member school districts. Member districts include some of the biggest districts in the United States. To be a member, districts must qualify as urban by the U.S. Department of Education. From that member list, it was established that fourteen of the superintendents were female. After reviewing the websites of these fourteen districts, it was determined that nine of the female superintendents fit the criteria of having served for not less than three years and had shown significant increases in student achievement. A member of the board of directors was contacted and agreed to contact the candidates for this study. The board member was informed of the criteria and made contact with the participants.

Urban school districts are the most challenging educational institutions in America according to numerous studies and reports. There are thousands of these districts sprinkled throughout our nation, most have male superintendents (AASA, 2010). There are districts that have female superintendents that do not fare any better with regard to student achievement than do those with male superintendents. Remarkably, there are districts with a woman at the helm that have shown extraordinary gains in student achievement. Five women who fit this description were the subjects in this study.

### **Sampling Strategy-Sites and Participants**

Two levels of sampling are typical in case study research (Krathwohl, 1998). The researcher selects the case to be studied and then selects a sample within the case to make reliable inferences about the nature of the population to be studied (Stake, 1995). For this multi-case study, several cases were selected based on the criteria. Each participant that met the researcher's criteria was contacted by a Council board member. Nine women met all three criteria, only five agreed to participate.



In qualitative research, a descriptive and exploratory study calls for a detailed account of a well-defined sample that provides a basis for further research. Sample size is typically small and participants were selected for their ability to provide detailed information on the topic to be studied. Purposeful sampling provides thoughtful consideration of the complexities of the setting, research tools and other resources to be used in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The sample study provided a “series of continua for thinking about one’s role in planning the conduct of qualitative research” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 79).

The intent of this study is to examine the experiences of successful women nominated by a peer in the superintendency of urban districts and board member of the Council of Great City Schools. The following six sampling criteria were used:

1. Gender: Participants must be female
2. Contacted by a Member of the CGCS Board of Directors: The board member is known to the researcher. Given his position, his early contact with potential participants made it more likely to get participants.
3. Position: All participants must serve as superintendents
4. Success: All urban districts must show continual gains in student achievement under the tenure of the participant, exhibiting a minimum of five percent growth over a three year period of time.
5. Tenure of Service: Participant must hold the position of superintendent in the current district for at least three years
6. Representation: Out of fourteen potential participants, nine met the criteria, five agreed to participate.

## Participants

There are thousands of urban school districts throughout the United States. To determine where the successful women superintendents were, the researcher searched the internet for organizations catering to women in leadership positions in urban areas. The Council of Great City Schools stood out for its mission and membership. The mission of the Council of Great City Schools is: “A coalition of sixty-five of the largest urban public school districts in the U.S., the council promotes the improvement of education through research, legislation, advocacy, and special projects” (<http://www.cgcs.org>). This organization was founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961. The mission of Council of Great City Schools is: “It is the special mission of America’s urban public schools to educate the nation’s most diverse student body to the highest academic standards and prepare them to contribute to our democracy and the global community” (<http://www.cgcs.org>).

Of the sixty-five districts represented in the academic year of 2011-2012, fifty-four had male superintendents and fourteen had female superintendents. For this study, the researcher initially found nine women met the criteria of the study. Five did not have at least three years tenure in the district or did not show improved student achievement. Invitations were sent to the nine candidates requesting their participation in the study. Two did not respond to the invitation and two declined the opportunity. The table below is a summary of the five participants’ years of experience in the district, district size, and percent increase on state assessments during their tenure.

**Table 1 Participants**  
**Participants' Years in Current Superintendent Position, District Size, Years of Experience in Current Position.**

<b>Participant Identifier</b>	<b>District Identifier</b>	<b>Years in Current Position</b>	<b>District Size</b>	<b>Increase in Student Achievement</b>
<b>P1</b>	<b>District A</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>191,000</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>P2</b>	<b>District B</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>50,000</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>P3</b>	<b>District C</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>34,000</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>P4</b>	<b>District D</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>86,000</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>P5</b>	<b>District E</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>45,000</b>	<b>3%</b>

### **Collection of Data for Analysis**

The primary sources of data for this study came from the two telephone interviews done with each of the five participants. Other documents and artifacts played an important role but were not as significant as the interview data. Additional documents and artifacts were collected about each participant and her district. These documents were examined and used to corroborate the interview data.

### **Interview Data Collection**

Once permission was acquired, contact was established with the participants to schedule two interviews with each. The interview guide may be found in Appendix (D). The research questions were aligned with each question in the interview guide (see Table 3) Permission was obtained via email from the president of the Council of Great City Schools board of directors to reference his name in the letter to participate in this study. Nine letters were sent to the women who met the criteria to participate in the study. Five were returned via postal service or email.

Informed consent was acquired from each of the participants. The first interview took place on May 18, 2012. Interviews took place through May, June, July and August, 2012. Table 3 below shows the relationship between the interview questions and the research sub questions.

Interviews were conducted and digitally recorded. The interview tapes were downloaded and transcribed for analysis. Each interview was 30-40 minutes in length. One interview was held in three segments due to the participants' extensive answers and curiosity about the study. The information collected from the written documents as well as the interviews provided the researcher with rich data for analysis.

### **Vita and Demographic Data Collection**

Collecting vitas from each participant helped the researcher gain insight and background information about each participant. The participants' vitas helped the researcher identify common experiences and confirm interview data. The demographic data from the district websites were collected. Facts from participants' biographies, online journal articles, Council of Great City Schools publications, and vitas were collected and compiled for examination.

Diversity and commonalities in professional experience added context to the study. Each piece of information provided context for the examination of the interview data. This information provided connections among the participants.

### **Biographies and News Articles Data Collection**

Biographies for each participant were collected from reliable sources online such as district websites or newspaper sources. The researcher also conducted web searches of each specific school district to acquire detailed information. Additionally, information from the Council of Great City Schools was examined to add to the pertinent information about the participants and the districts they serve. The collection of vitas, biographies and other published information

about each of the participants added rich context to the study and allowed the researcher more stability and objectivity in analyzing the data. A great advantage in using documentary material is its stability and objectivity (Merriam, 1998).

These data, furnished by the participants and collected from a variety of documents, allowed the researcher descriptive information to support an emerging understanding and analysis of factors involved in the experiences of women urban superintendents. Merriam (1998) suggests data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities. The analysis begins with the first documents collected. Hunches and tentative emerging patterns directed each phase of the data collection. Refinement of these patterns was focused and intentional.

**Table 2 Data Collected and Analyzed**

**Documents Collected and Analyzed**

<b>Participant (P)</b>	<b>2 Telephone Interviews</b>	<b>Articles from The Council of Great City Schools</b>	<b>State Departments of Education State Report Card, Budget Info,</b>	<b>Vita</b>	<b>Published Written Interviews</b>	<b>District Website Information Newsletters, Program Information, Superintendent Podcast, Blog, Strategic Plan</b>
<b>P 1</b>	2	2	1	1	3	5
<b>P 2</b>	2	4	1	1	0	3
<b>P 3</b>	2	2	1	1	1	3
<b>P 4</b>	2	3	1	1	4	6

P 5	2	1	1	1	2	4
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### Guide to Understanding Interview Protocol

The following is a guide to understanding aspects of the interview protocol questions detailed in Table 3.

**Context:** Structure or circumstances that allow for a deeper understanding.

**Q1: Sub Question 1-**What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants’ practices from a leadership perspective?

**Q2: Sub Question 2-**What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants’ use of change theory practices for improving student achievement?

**Q3: Sub Question 3-**What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenge participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency?

**Table 3: Interview Protocol Related to Research Sub Questions**

#### Interview Protocol Related to Research Sub Questions

Interview Protocol Questions Related to Research Sub Questions				
Interview Session 1				
Interview Question	Context	Q1	Q2	Q3
<b>General Overview</b>				
1. How would you describe yourself as a leader?	X	X		X
2. What skills do you have that serve you best in your position?	X	X		X
3. What experiences have you had that most influence your leadership for change?	X	X	X	X
<p><b>Leadership:</b> We describe leadership as commitment and persistence to moving everyone in the same direction until goals are reached. Leadership includes reciprocity, or creating leaders within the system by building relationships so that others can use their expertise to sustain the momentum towards the goals (Reeves, 2007)</p>				

1. How would you describe yourself as a leader?	X	X		X
2. How do you access the expertise of others?		X		X
3. Are there different leadership strategies you use with your board than you use with your staff? What are those strategies?		X		X
4. Describe your vision for the district.		X	X	X
5. How do you lead to ensure the vision for the district is realized?	X	X		X
6. How do you measure success in moving toward the district vision?	X	X		X
7. How have you built relationships with staff; central office administration; principals; teachers; others?	X			X
8. How have you built relationships with the community?	X			X
9. What are your primary method/methods of communication with the board; administrative team; teachers; community?	X			X
10. How do you make decisions? Who is involved?	X	X		X
11. How do you sharpen your leadership skills?	X	X		X
12. How do you build leadership capacity in others?	X	X		X
<b>Change:</b> We define change as new beliefs; new understandings; a new set of behaviors/practices and new materials (Fullan, 2009).				
1. Given our definition, what are the biggest change you have undertaken since you arrived in the superintendent's office?	X			X
2. What is the role of vision in the change process?			X	
3. How do you keep the district vision at the forefront?			X	
4. What is the role of skills in the change process?			X	
5. What skills were needed and how did you develop those skills in your staff?			X	
6. Did you provide incentives to influence change?			X	
7. What incentives were used?			X	
8. What resources were provided?			X	
9. What role did the right resources play in the change process?	X		X	
10. Describe your action plan for change?			X	X
11. What advice about change would you share with others?	X		X	X

12. Given our definition, in your view, how does change intersect with leadership to create significant growth in student achievement?	X	X	X	X
<b>Interview Guide Session 2</b>				
1. As you reflect on your work as superintendent, what is it about your work you find most rewarding?	X			X
2. Most challenging?	X			X
3. What would you most like women aspiring to the superintendency to know?	X			X
4. What advice would you give others in the superintendency?	X			X
5. Is there anything you would like to add to provide context for the work you do with regards to leadership and change for growth in student achievement?	X			X

The leadership questions are based on the leadership attributes defined by the work of Doug Reeves (2007). The change questions are based on the attributes defined by the work of Michael Fullan (2009) and put into the framework below by Knoster, Villa & Thousand (2000).

Qualitative research involves substantial engagement with the participants over a period of time. Much time is invested in knowing the context in which the participants work (Stake, 1995). To develop the context, a substantial amount of time was devoted to online newspaper and district newsletter article reviews about the women in the study. Interviewing for qualitative research is a way of discovering what others think and feel about their world. Through qualitative interviews, the researcher understands and reconstructs events in which he/she was not a participant (Stake, 1995). Interviews provide a means of understanding and sharing that understanding of both the researched and the researcher (Rubin, & Rubin, 1995). Meaning is much more than “just facts” (Stake, 1995). Interviewing allows access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for the researcher to understand the meaning of that behavior (Seidman, 1998).



There is a continuum of interviews with increasing amounts of structure. Krathwohl (1998) writes the continuum ranges from unstructured interviews characterized as an open, exploratory method, to partially structured, semi-structured, structured, and finally, totally structured where all questions, order and coding are predetermined. In this study, the interview protocol began as structured so the same questions, in the same order, were asked of each participant. As themes and other topics emerged, semi-structured interviews were used so more comprehensive information could be gathered. More specifically, the structured interview questions were designed from the research questions and sub questions addressed in Chapter one. The intent of each interview was to systematically explore the core change strategies and leadership skills successful female superintendents employ in moving their urban school district to higher levels of student achievement.

The first section of questions was general and aimed at establishing rapport with the participants. These questions also allowed for more descriptive and foundational information. This allowed perceptions and opinions of the respondents to be established. The second section of questions focused on personal beliefs about change, leadership, and navigating the challenges of the superintendency. The third section of questions captured the gender-related behaviors the women identified as influential in their success. This included asking questions about how gender-related experiences and expectations influenced decisions, change strategies, and leadership challenges in working to improve student achievement.

Participants were given the interview questions in advance to prepare their answers. This allowed for more detailed answers to the questions. Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided with the Informed Consent Form to read and sign. Measures were taken to ensure

anonymity of each participant. Permission to tape record and transcribe the interviews was obtained prior to the start of the interview (see Appendix C).

Preferably, the researcher would have conducted the interviews on-site, face-to-face. Telephone interviews were more economical and logistically less demanding for the participants and the researcher. Not meeting face to face was difficult in that the researcher could not observe the non-verbal cues needed to more accurately interpret the remarks of the participants. It was also more difficult to develop a relationship and judge the extent to which the participants wished to expand on the responses.

### **Description of the Participants**

References to identify where district and participant information was retrieved has been omitted to protect the anonymity of each participant and district. District websites, state departments of education, the Council of Great City Schools, and other reliable sites were used but are not identified.

Participant One was the superintendent in a large urban school district in the Southeast. The school district had 191,000 pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and encompassed the entire county. The student population was 40% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, 21% African American, with about equal amounts of students of Asian, Native American and Multi-Cultural decent represented. Fifty-four percent of the student population was economically disadvantaged according to the state department of education. Twenty-five thousand, or about 13% of the district student population were English language learners according to the state department of education.

Participant Two was a superintendent in a mid-size urban school district in the Pacific Northwest. The school district had a student population of approximately 50,000 students, pre-

kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Forty-seven percent of the population was Caucasian. Fifty-three percent of the population was comprised of Asian, African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Multi Ethnic students, about equally distributed in 10-13% increments. Ninety different languages were spoken within the boundaries of this district. Eleven percent of the district's students were in English as a second language program. Forty-four percent of students in this district were classified as EDS, (economic disadvantaged students) according to the district website.

Participant Three was a superintendent in the Mid-West. Her district was the highest rated urban school district in the state according to the state department of education. Her district had a student population of just under 34,000 students, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Sixty-nine percent of the student population was African American, 24% was Caucasian, 2% was Hispanic, and the remaining 5% of the population was equally distributed among Multi Ethnic, Native American, and Asian. Seventy-three percent of the population was economically disadvantaged. Fifteen percent of the student population of this district was English language learners as reported by the state department of education.

Participant Four was a superintendent in an urban school district in the Southwest. According to the state department of education this district was one of the largest in the state. The district had a population of 87,000 students, pre K-12<sup>th</sup> grade with 76% minority. Sixty percent of the population was Hispanic. As reported by the district website, the Hispanic student population had realized the greatest increase at about 3% per year since 2000. Sixty-four percent of the student population was economically disadvantaged. Just over 30% of the students in this district were English language learners, a population that increases at about 4% per year. More

than 70 different languages were spoken by students in this district as reported by the district website.

Remarkably, 80% of the students in this district met the state proficiency expectations in reading and math based on the state report card found on the state department of education website. The district continued to improve and annually win state achievement awards.

Participant Four had been the superintendent in this district for five years. In that time, she had implemented several programs focusing on early childhood language development.

Participant Five was the superintendent in a historically low performing school district in the eastern United States. This district had a population of 45,000 students. Sixty-nine percent of the student population in this district were African American, 13% were Hispanic, 16% were Caucasian, and two percent of the student population were classified as “other” as reported by the district website. This district had an economically disadvantaged population of 61% and nine percent of the population was English language learners. All of this information was gathered from both the city education website and the district website.

Participant Five had worked in the district for six years. She began her career as a Spanish teacher in a middle school. She came to her current district to serve as director of human capital and human resources. After working in the district for three years she was recruited by the mayor to serve as interim superintendent. Within months she was named to the position on a more permanent basis. Participant Five says, “The whole thing was a shock in some ways, the appointment came at such a tumultuous time”.

Participant Five had focused on helping teachers be more effective through intense professional development and a teacher evaluation system called the Impact Evaluation System. This system evaluated teachers on key indicators including implementation of training and

student academic growth. Participant Five says, “I am dedicated to ensuring every child has a high quality teacher and leader”.

Participant Five was “outspoken” and “unwavering” in her dedication to closing the achievement gaps in the district. She headed up one of the lowest performing, high poverty, high minority, districts in the country. She “will not allow students to fail because they did not have the opportunity to learn” (P5). “Because a child is Black and poor does not mean he cannot succeed, go to college, earn his way out of the projects...it is up to us to make that happen” (P5).

Participant Five had little time anymore for organizations and clubs. She says, “I have my church and I serve on a couple committees with the city council, but I just can’t get to too much more than that”. She had won leadership awards from various colleges and universities in the area.

Chapter Five is a deeper description of each case. The participants had such rich experiences it was necessary to describe each in greater detail than should be done in this chapter.

### **Data Analysis**

The complexity of analyzing a large body of narrative information, all of which was narrative, calls for each piece to be separated into smaller segments based on the key themes in leadership for change. For this study, the key themes in leadership for change are based on *A Framework for Thinking About Systems Change*, (Knoster, Villa, & Thousand, 2000) and *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results* (Reeves, 2007).

Focusing on process, meaning, and understanding is the intent of qualitative research. Instead of analyses and numeric results, rich descriptions communicate the profundity of the researcher’s work. The data are the description of the context, the participants, and the

complexities in the study. The data form the researcher's words and ideas. They direct the contextual information as cited in the documents gathered during the study (Creswell, 1998).

Data management was paramount in research and must be considered before a study is initiated. For this study, a letter of participation was documented, a questionnaire to verify experience was filed and initial and follow up interview questions were established. Creswell (1998) recommends the data analysis spiral down from general ideas to concrete beliefs, where the researcher gleans information from interviews and context information, and enters the narrative excerpts into a coded table to manipulate into patterns. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Context documents were printed, documented and filed. These documents were reviewed for additional interpretation to establish the case.

The conceptual frameworks for the case were foundational for managing the data. The data were first analyzed for leadership attributes discussed in Chapter two. The data then were analyzed for the attributes of change also discussed in Chapter two. Thirdly, the data were analyzed for the challenges outlined in Chapter two. Finally, the data were analyzed for emerging themes based on the patterns found in each area for analysis.

For this study, the information from related documents other than interviews were gathered and categorized for a deeper view of the participants. The frequency of common comments, answers, biography, and vita information were coded into the tables to allow for ease of interpretation for the researcher and others. The following matrix was used to sort the data.

**Table 4 Data Sources Related to Research Questions**

<b>Data Sources Related to Research Questions</b>				
<b>Main research question:</b> What patterns exist in the perceptions of urban female superintendents with respect to the challenges of leadership and change?	<b>Data Source</b>			
<b>Research sub-questions</b>	Interview I	Interview II	Vita	Biography
1. What patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants regarding leadership practices from a transformational perspective?	X			X
2. What common patterns exist in the use of change theory and practices for improving student achievement?	X		X	X
3. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenges participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency, and how do they manage these challenges?	X	X		X

A first step in determining how the data might address particular research sub questions was to create a table summarizing the various data sources and the research sub questions. The researcher then reviewed and aligned the data with the research questions. This table shows the various sources of data collection and identifies which sub research question may be addressed in that data source.

**Background and Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in this qualitative study was predominantly to gather, analyze, and interpret data. The interviewer used follow-up questions when answers warranted further inquiry. The researcher is human and brings with her a schema that may bias the interpretation

of the information. Human researchers make mistakes. An awareness of these shortcomings is critical to acknowledge throughout the data collection and analysis process. With this in mind, the researcher's background and reliability are imperative to the research and the significance of the study.

The researcher was a doctoral student in educational leadership and was employed as the assistant superintendent in a 6A public school system in Kansas. This researcher spent twenty-nine years working in public education including sixteen years teaching kindergarten through high school English, with the exception of seventh and eighth grades. In addition to the sixteen years of teaching experience, the researcher spent eleven years as an elementary principal, three years as the executive director of elementary education and was just beginning her first year as the assistant superintendent. This experience took place in several different school districts in three states. The researcher had no superintendent experience. She had nine years' experience in high poverty, high minority and high English as a second language setting.

The researcher had several unique experiences worth noting. She participated in three separate one week sessions at the Harvard University Principal's Center. The sessions included; Leadership Accountability, National Institute for Urban School Leaders, and the Efficacy Institute. Each of these learning opportunities developed a persistent interest in the challenges of urban school systems.

The researcher had served in many professional and community organizations such as AASA, ASCD, IRA, NAEP, United Way, Big Brothers Big Sisters board of directors, McPherson College Advisory Board and others. As a result of this experience, the researcher is uniquely qualified to understand confidentiality, analysis of data sets, and has remarkable



communication skills. She believes she is sensitive and intuitive. These skills serve qualitative researchers well in gathering and analyzing data.

### **Validation Strategies**

In any research, Creswell (1998) “views verification as a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis, and report writing of a study and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is complete”, (p.194). An assumption underlying qualitative research is that reality is dynamic, holistic, and multidimensional. A qualitative study offers the reader a rich, robust description of the author’s conclusions, allowing sensible, practical agreement. Creswell (2007) argues that qualitative research requires various validation strategies to ensure the study is credible and rigorous.

Creswell (2007) offers eight validation strategies. The first of these is prolonged engagement where the researcher works day to day for a long period of time learning the culture, building trust and checking for misunderstanding. A second strategy is triangulation, or the use of multiple sources to crosscheck data. Still another validation strategy is peer review. The use of this strategy calls for external checks of the research process. A fourth strategy is negative case analysis where the researcher refines and revises the initial hypotheses until all cases fit. The fifth strategy is clarifying. The researcher uses comments on past experiences, biases, and prejudices, that are likely to shape his/her interpretation and approach to the study. Member checking is the sixth strategy. Member checking is used to solicit participant’s views of the credibility of the findings. A rich, thick description is the seventh validation strategy. This strategy allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability based on the details of the study. The final strategy is external audits. This strategy allows an external consultant, the

auditor, to examine both the process and the product of the study, assessing the accuracy Creswell (2007).

Three strategies were used to confirm the authenticity of the findings. The first strategy was multiple data sources (telephone interviews, participants' biographies collected from school district websites, and participants' vitas) to add perspective and rich detail to the case. Each participant provided a vita and completed an open-ended questionnaire to verify experience and education. Multiple data sources included review of district and state departments of education websites for information about the district size, communications, strategic plan, and student achievement. State departments of education and the Council of Great City Schools websites were examined for verification of district student achievement information. This information afforded the researcher the opportunity to compare the information for both major and minor themes. The narrative was credible and reliable because multiple forms of evidence were studied.

The qualitative study takes place in the natural world and, therefore, is interpretive (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The social context is critical to review as interpretation takes place. In this study, member checking was employed as a second strategy to confirm the researcher's interpretation of the interview information for accuracy and clarification. The five participants were provided the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. Two of the participants did review and confirm their interview information. Three chose not to return their review to the researcher.

The final validation strategy involved the use of corroborating evidence to determine themes (Creswell, 2007). This strategy of peer review involved external checking of the research process. A doctoral candidate from Kansas State University well trained in research methods

participated in a second coding process to review the researchers coding of the interviews. The second coder had 22 years-experience in education and served as a district superintendent. The second coder had no stake in the outcome of this study. She reviewed one entire transcript. Once the researcher compared both coding of the same transcript, the second coder reviewed an additional five percent of the responses. The second coder agreed with the researcher in 90% of the responses. The remaining 10% the researcher and second coder did not agree upon can be attributed to the overlap in change, leadership, and challenges definitions. Units of data can seldom be coded with a consensus rate of 100% (Stake, 1995).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical concerns arise in qualitative research with respect to the well-being and confidentiality of the study participants. This study adhered to the guidelines of informed consent and protection from harm. Both were key factors that govern research of human subjects (Creswell, 1998). The Kansas State University Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Each participant in this study was contacted via postal mail service with a description of the nature and purpose of the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and the anonymity of each participant was ensured by assigning aliases to each volunteer. Each school district was assigned a letter and is identified by general region to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Women who agreed to participate signed an Informed Consent form that described the purpose of the study as well as the guarantee of anonymity. All data collected during this study will be filed in a secure location for three years.

### **Summary**

This study used a multi-case qualitative research design with two semi-structured interviews and background information collected. Participants from large urban school districts who were

members of the Council of Great City Schools organization were selected based on established criteria. All data collection, data analysis, and ensuring credibility and consistency of the data were described in this chapter. Ethical considerations were addressed.

The following chapter is a description of each of the five participants to give the reader a deeper understanding of the group studied. Careful attention was given to ensure the superintendent or her district could not be identified. Each participant has a rich history in education from which others can learn.

## CHAPTER 4: CASE DESCRIPTIONS

### Introduction

Purposeful selection resulted in some similarities in participants. All participants were female, urban superintendents, with three years or more in their current position, and their districts were member districts of the Council of Great City Schools. Each participant’s district had a high number of minority students, economically disadvantaged students, and students with English as a second language. Each participant had unique characteristics as well.

Participants were unique in years of tenure in the superintendency. They were unique in career paths to the district’s top positions. Each participant’s district varied in size, although all were classified as urban. Table 5 outlines each district’s demographics, while Table 6 outlines each participant’s professional data.

**Table 5 District Demographics**

#### District Demographics

<b>Participant/ Location</b>	<b>Total Student Population</b>	<b>Economically Disadvantaged %</b>	<b>African American %</b>	<b>Caucasian %</b>	<b>Asian %</b>	<b>Native American %</b>	<b>Hispanic %</b>	<b>Multi Cultural %</b>	<b>English Language Learners %</b>
<b>P1- Southeast</b>	193,000	54%	21%	40%	4%	NA	30%	5%	13%
<b>P2-Pacific Northwest</b>	50,000	44%	5%	47%	15%	10%	10%	13%	11%
<b>P3- Midwest</b>	34,000	73%	69%	24%	2%	NA	2%	2%	15%
<b>P4- Southwest</b>	87,000	64%	10%	24%	3%	NA	60%	<1%	30%
<b>P5- East</b>	45,000	61%	69%	16%	NA	NA	13%	2%	9%

The following table gives biographical information for each of the five participants. This table gives the general geographical location of the school district, the highest degree completed by the participant, and the work experience of each participant.

**Table 6 Biographical Information**

**Biographical Information**

<b>Participant/ Location</b>	<b>Highest Degree Completed</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Principal</b>	<b>Director</b>	<b>Years in District</b>	<b>Years as Superintendent</b>
P1- Southeast	MS	High School Reading and Social Studies	NA	Director of Alternative Programs	26	7
P2-Pacific Northwest	MS	Elementary	Elementary	Director of Elementary Education	27	20
P3-Midwest	MS	Elementary	Elementary	Chief Academic Officer	36	4
P4- Southwest	Ph.D	Elementary	Lang. Arts	Director of Accountability	5	5
P5-DC East	MS	Middle School Spanish	NA	Director of Teacher Professional Development	6	3

Each participant had remarkably rich qualities that are described in this chapter. There was a vast amount of information to review online. In addition to the online news articles and interviews, the researcher collected a vita and biography from each participant. Each piece of information provided a deeper look into the experience of the participants in terms of leadership

for change. References to specific websites were deleted to protect the confidentiality of each participant and her district.

### **Participant One**

Participant One had served as superintendent for seven years. She began her career as a high school social studies teacher in another state. She but relocated to her current district 26 years ago and accepted a position as a high school reading specialist. She was promoted to several key positions in the district before accepting the superintendency. She had served as facilities officer, director of non-traditional programs, and a drop-out prevention director also known as Director of Alternative Programs.

Participant One held two master's degrees; one in reading and one in curriculum and instruction. She also had certification in educational leadership. She had been awarded the state's Data Leadership Award, the Governor's Business Partnership Award, the state's Women of Distinction Award, the Network of Executive Women Award and the College Board's Outstanding Leadership Award. She also was named the state's superintendent of the year. Under her leadership, the district had reached and maintained a grade of A from the state, based on state assessments.

Participant One's district was located in Southeastern United States, had continually accomplished higher levels of achievement in reading, math, science, and social studies through the implementation and monitoring of the district's strategic plan. The plan had four goals: "create a capable workforce for the future; attract new companies, residents, and investments; help students grow into successful and responsible citizens; and, build a community supportive of educators". The vision of Participant One's district was "to become the nation's leader in developing successful students". The mission of the district was "to provide an education that

enables each student to excel as a successful and responsible citizen” according to the district’s website.

Further, the strategic plan for this district included eight strategic objectives framed within four categories. The categories were “student achievement, human resources, financial management, and safety”, as detailed in the district’s strategic plan found on the district website. The objectives that fell within the student achievement category were: “improve student achievement, demonstrate consistent and effective teaching methods, challenge, motivate, and support all students with an appropriate curriculum”. The objectives that were included in human resources are: “recruit, develop, reward, and retain a highly effective and diverse workforce;” and “align the performance management system with district priorities”. The financial management objectives were: “align financial resources to support the district’s strategic goals;” and “demonstrate best financial practices”. The final strategic category-safety - has one objective: “promote a culture of safety and respect that is free from harassment, bullying, and aggression while demonstrating best practices in all areas of safety”, according to the strategic plan found on the district website.

With the strategic plan as the action plan for success, Participant One led her district to remarkable heights. The district was nationally recognized for having the highest annual increase in high school students passing AP (Advanced Placement) exams as reported by the local newspaper website. The district led the state in the number of public school students named as National Merit Scholar finalists, with a total of 63; a 23 percent increase over the previous year as reported by the local newspaper website.

Participant One attributed the district’s success to her communication, relationships and support of the leadership of her administrative team within the district and community. She



indicated she is a “high energy person, who never stops”. Participant One is very involved in her community and feels that was critical in moving her district forward. She was a member of the United Way, Red Cross, Rotary Club, hospital board, Chamber of Commerce, Council of Great City Schools, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Council of Urban Schools, and numerous civic organizations. Participant One described her relationship with the Board of Education in this way:

I’ve already said that the governing function is one of my top CEO priorities, so I really do pay considerable attention to keeping my working relationship with my Board of Education close and positive. Experience has taught me that a solid relationship must be based on mutual respect, and I’m sure that the attitude I bring to my work with the Board makes a real difference in terms of building a cohesive Board-Superintendent team. I’m what you’d call a board-friendly superintendent; I believe in strong board leadership, and my Board knows it. That’s an indispensable foundation for any partnership. You also need to know that I commit substantial time to working with my Board – at least a full day on the average every week, if not more. A good deal of that time is spent creatively thinking about ways I can engage my Board members that make full use of all of the talent, experience, expertise, and community contacts that they bring with them to the boardroom, states Participant One. (taken from a national journal that if referenced may reveal the participant’s identity)

Participant One’s school district received a 100 million dollar grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to “empower effective teachers”. The Intensive Partnerships for Effective Teaching grant was a major investment in K-12 education reform on the part of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. During the course of the seven-year initiative, District A was committed to accomplishing several goals.

The district intends to use the funds to develop a quality new-teacher induction program that would include true mentoring relationships; improve our teacher and principal evaluation systems; enhance our professional development system; provide effective incentives for teachers who work with our highest needs students; and improve our entire compensation plan, (Participant One, May 2012).

Participant One believed teachers have the highest impact on student learning so she puts a lot of time and energy into making teaching and learning the primary focus of the work she does.

When she began her superintendency she recalls having to “break down the silos” of the district to bring everyone together to focus on student learning. She met weekly and biweekly with her administrative staff. She implemented a new professional development training system for building principals and leaders of divisions within the district, (Participant One, May 2012).

Participant One sought out the advice of experts when she must make most decisions. She indicated that she was not afraid to make tough decisions but she had to have all the facts as well as the advice of experts to make the best decisions. She kept her board president and vice president updated through weekly meetings, daily emails and/or phone calls. She says her board expected her to make district level decisions and keep them fully informed. “They do not micro manage the district decisions”, says Participant One.

Participant One considered relationships critical in moving the district forward. She reasons that much of her success came from the fact that she had been in the district for 26 years and most people knew her on a personal level. She indicated the relationships she had built over the years have served her well in creating change to bring about improved student achievement. Participant One was involved in numerous community organizations. She insisted that “it takes everyone to support our schools, to make kids successful”. Participant One believed her relationships with the community, teachers, and administrators that were in place before she took the district’s top spot, had a great impact on her success. “People know me, they know what I’m all about and that I’m about kids”, she says.

Participant One offered wonderful advice for those aspiring to the superintendency. She says, “Don’t be discouraged if you don’t get the job you want, your time will come”. She added, “watch how you act if you don’t get a position, because others are watching and how you act will show your character”. Participant One offered this for leaders who are in the superintendency;

“Work hard to earn the trust of others and break down the barriers to make things happen for kids”.

### **Participant Two**

Participant Two began her career as an elementary classroom teacher, and then served as elementary principal, finally reaching the central office after 14 years. She served in two separate central office positions, executive director of elementary education and then assistant superintendent for instruction, before accepting the superintendency in 2000. Participant Two indicated that she “never intended to be a superintendent, but after seeing superintendents come and go she was recruited to be the interim until a suitable replacement could be found”. After a national search that did not yield a suitable candidate, Participant Two accepted the position at the request of her board.

Participant Two held a master’s degree in public school administration with post master’s degree work in curriculum and instruction. She believed it is “essential to be an active participant in community organizations”. She served on the board of directors for the local hospital, United Way, chamber of commerce, Rotary Club, city economic development corporation, state Council of Schools and the Council of Great City Schools. She was a member of numerous other local community organizations as well. Participant Two believed one of her greatest leadership strengths came from her involvement in the community and the relationships she had built over the years as a result of being a big part of many organizations. She reported, “My God, everyone knows me, I’ve lived here for nearly 50 years, I’ve coached my kids T-ball teams and I’ve led some of the largest organizations in the city”. (P 2) Participant Two had received numerous awards including: state superintendent of the year, Soroptomist “Woman of

Distinction, the state Liberty Award, the Beth Shalom “Shining Light Award”, and the state Women’s Hall of Fame.

District scores in reading, math and writing have continued to increase during Participant Two’s tenure. The achievement gap among minorities has decreased by 8% under Participant One’s leadership. Some of the program changes under Participant Two’s leadership include a STEP program. This was an extensive lending library that concentrated on disability information and resources to support student learning. This library was for students, parents and educators and it was open year around. Other programs included the International Baccalaureate diploma program, advanced placement, social emotional learning curriculum, Response to Intervention, Culturally Responsive Education, standards based grading, and extensive professional development programs for administrators and teachers.

Participant Two took great care in meeting the needs of her students. She reported that in her regular meetings with high schools students she discovered Jewish students did not participate in track and field events because the largest district track meet was held on a Holy week for Jews. She determined that no student would be excluded based on “something as simple as changing a calendar”. She worked with her board to adopt policies that honored the 10 most important holy days for Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Native Americans.

When students noticed her attention to these kinds of details, the Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Students approached her to divulge the discrimination they had endured. She reported that she thought the non-discrimination policy addressed the rights of these students. Unfortunately, that was not the case. Participant Two discovered that the non-discrimination policy must read “...not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation”. During a regularly scheduled call in radio show where she was the guest, a high school student called in to report

his experiences. He reported that he and others like him were bullied on a regular basis. He indicated that he was often so fearful he had difficulty focusing on learning.

Participant Two's concern led her to invite the young man to call her the following day for further the conversation. Speaking with the student made her realize this was a significant problem that had an impact on the learning. Participant Two's lifelong dedication to "all students learning" (P2) drove her decision to confront the issue.

Participant Two met with the high school principals first. She shared the information she had and her expectations for change. She met individually with the principal whose school the young man attended and outlined her immediate expectations. Once initial measures were in place to protect gay students, Participant Two worked with the community to bring about the necessary mindset to support policy change. She knew the religious community was going to be "a tough nut to crack" but to her credit, she was able to appeal to their desire for safety for all students. Participant Two shared that there had been a stabbing months before the gay bullying issue surfaced. The stabbing at an elementary school had increased the community's awareness for student safety so bringing another student safety issue to the forefront was less daunting than it might otherwise have been.

Once community support was in place, she went to her board and led them to add the words "...will not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation", as part of non-discrimination policy. Participant Two shared that these amending the non-discrimination policy and the STEP program have been among her "proudest moments".

### **Participant Three**

Participant Three was appointed superintendent in 2009 after a year as interim superintendent. She held a bachelor's degree in biology education and philosophy and a master's degree in business administration. She began her career in the district 36 years ago as a math and science teacher at the middle school level. Participant Three served as a high school teacher as well as an elementary principal. She was a native of the city in which she works and has spent her entire career in the district. She attributes much of her success in the superintendency to her "continuous involvement in multiple civic organizations throughout the city", (P3). "People know me, they know what I stand for and what I stand against," says Participant Three, I still work with teachers I went to school with as a kid". "I have developed close relationships, friendships really, with many of the leaders of the city and my own leaders in the district", (P3).

Participant Three served on numerous boards of civic, cultural, educational and social-service organizations. She had won numerous state and local leadership awards including the Excellence in Educational Leadership Award from The University Council for Educational Administration. As a principal, participant three's leadership at the elementary level won her school the U.S. Department's National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award. Based on the increase in academic achievement for two consecutive years, Participant Three's district had been recognized by the state department of education as the "highest-rated urban school district" in the state.

Participant Three's priorities included "enhancing collaboration and transparency while accelerating academic achievement", (P3). When she began her superintendency, 16 of the 48 elementary schools were classified by the state as "academic emergencies", (state department of

education). The district had been designated as “low performing” by the state. This means the entire district failed to meet annual “Adequate Yearly Progress” on the state assessments for four consecutive years. Participant Three designed and implemented several initiatives beginning with the Elementary Initiative: Ready for High School. This plan called for intensive support for each of the district’s lowest performing elementary schools.

Thirty-two elementary schools were provided universal support; meaning these schools would be provided with professional development to use data to make evidenced based instructional decisions; expand school-site learning teams; train primary and intermediate content specialists to work with teachers in each building; support differentiated instruction with cadres of experts; implement new student achievement based principal evaluation system; and become family and community friendly, (district website).

Sixteen elementary schools were targeted for “intensive support”. These schools had struggled academically for years, and had the state’s lowest rating for a number of years. Intensive support is described as:

1. Comprehensive audits of each school
2. Realignment of resources to address the needs of individual children
3. Success Plans for each child
4. An intensive focus on mathematics and reading, including a change in the way reading is taught in grades 4-8
5. A summer program named "Fifth Quarter," which extended learning time by a month at each EI school, and expanded early childhood programs including a kindergarten-readiness program for at-risk 4-year-olds.

It quickly became obvious however, that culture change would not happen without outstanding leadership at each school, (district website).

Given the critical relationship between school leadership and student academic achievement, Participant Three developed and implemented “turnaround training” for principals. “My principals were floundering, they wanted to serve teachers and students but things had changed and they no longer had the skills they needed to move their schools forward”, (P3). This training involved successful business leaders in the community mentoring school principals. Professional

development training specifically designed for leadership in underperforming schools was part of the Elementary Initiative: Ready For High School plan. The GE Foundation monitored these low performing schools and their leaders on a regular basis. A new principal evaluation system was developed and used systematically to ensure fidelity.

Participant Three led a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) initiative to improve math and science education at both elementary and high school levels in the district. The GE Foundation provided a \$20-million grant with \$3-5-million per year extensions for successful schools. Participant Three believed it was “a great privilege to lead the district in preparing the next generation of young people with the skills required by a fast-paced, technologically demanding global economy” (district website). She has a reputation for building strong, supportive and open relationships with her staff as well as with parents and community stakeholders. Participant Three states; ““Every urban school district in the country is trying to turn around low-performing schools, but no other district has applied these principles on a scale like this” (P3).

At the high school level, in addition to implementing STEM, under Participant Three’s leadership the focus was on increasing the academic rigor of course offerings and expanding college access to all students. She worked closely with community organizations like United Way and several local colleges and universities to provide community learning centers and mentors for middle and high school students. A program called M.O.R. E. (Men Organized Respectful and Educated) was implemented when the Council of Great City Schools published their *A Call For Change Report* that outlined the need to support males, particularly African American males in nurturing academic success and strong character. This program’s goal was to prepare at-risk males for college by supporting career awareness, social skills, health and



wellness, good citizenship, and financial literacy. “Our kids need direction and support to stay in school, to know that school is important and can provide a good life for them”, (P3)

Before this program began, drop-out rates among all males was at 68% (state department of education) with higher rates for African American and Hispanic males. After the first two years of the program, drop-out rates for all males has been reduced by 10% (state department of education). “To know that 10% more of our at-risk males were staying in school was a rewarding accomplishment,” says Participant Three. “I’ll really celebrate when we reduced the drop-out rate by 90% or better,” reported Participant Three.

Both middle school and high school student scores on state assessments have increased continually under Participant Three’s tenure. The district’s performance index continues to increase with fewer and fewer schools designated as “low performing”. The state department of education in this Midwestern state calculates Participant Three’s district as in the “top 5% for growth in student learning” (state department of education) and the district is ranked as the highest achieving urban district in the state. The Council of Great City Schools noted the increase in achievement for this school district in its annual *Beating the Odds* (2011) report.

Participant Three encouraged aspiring superintendents to “never give up”. Her advice for those already serving in the district’s top spot is to “keep going with the vision”, (P3).

#### **Participant Four**

Participant Four served in a large urban district in the southwestern United States. The district served just under 87,000 students and had a budget of just under \$940,000,000. The district had been growing at about five percent per year the last five years. Participant Four served as superintendent in this district for five years. She began her career as a teacher in

Alabama. She had taught both elementary and middle school, served as accountability director, and served as superintendent in three other urban districts.

Participant Four was a member of numerous civic organizations in her city. She served on several local non-profit boards, including an advisory board for a local children's hospital. She was a member of the city research council. Participant Four was a member of the board for the Council of Great City Schools. She was an adjunct professor at a major university where she teaches educational leadership. Participant Four held two master's degrees and a Ph.D.

Unlike the other participants in this study, Participant Four had not held another position within the district before being selected as superintendent. Instead, she was selected through a nationwide search. She was the first female superintendent for her district and the first person of color to hold the position.

Participant Four's district was 60% Hispanic, 24% White, 10% African American, and the remaining 6% of students were made up of Asian, Native American, and multi-racial. Sixty-four percent of the students in this district lived in poverty based on the free and reduced lunch count (district website). Thirty percent of the students were English Language Learners. The district saw a steady gain of four to six percent in language learners on an annual basis (state department of education website).

Since Participant Four had taken the reins of the district, overall student achievement had increased six percent according to the state assessments mandated by the NCLB legislation. All ethnic groups in the district had realized noticeable improved achievement on the state assessments with Hispanic realizing the most significant improvement with a 10% increase overall in both reading and math.

Participant Four attributed this success to the community and staff involvement in designing the new strategic plan. The plan set forth a vision, goals, beliefs, an action plan, and a monitoring system. The strategic plan sets four goals the goals included: “All students will perform at or above grade level; Achievement gaps among student groups will be eliminated: All students will graduate college and career ready: All schools will meet or exceed all state accountability standards”, (school website). The district values focus on all children, excellence, integrity, and equity. The district’s action plan called for 18 specific actions based on what the district saw as areas in need of improvement. These actions were specific to certain areas of the city, specific to particular subgroups, and specific to kinds of professional development for staff. There were actions that called for financial transparency, facility maintenance and planning, and numerous other district specific actions.

In addition to the district goals, the strategic plan called for involvement from and with the community. Participant Four states, “The community must be involved to provide services and support for our children...we cannot do it all.” “Our students need the support of community services to meet their challenges so they can come to school ready to learn.”

The district offered dual language immersion programs as part of the actions to support the strategic plan. When Participant Four arrived in the district there were no widespread language programs to address English language learning while continuing to develop skills in the student’s native language. At that time, language learning was addressed in individual schools and in individual classrooms. Many elementary, middle and high schools had no plan at all to address language learning.

Participant Four believed, “if students are bilingual, bicultural, and biliterate, they are better prepared for college and careers...Students come to us with a whole lot of learning, we have to

tie that to what they need to learn to be successful in the wider, American culture,” she says. “I began with designating three elementary schools as dual language schools,” says Participant Four. “That grew quickly, because it was so successful,” she continues. “Last December my board voted to designate more schools as dual language because those students are doing so well.” The dual language programs teach all subjects in two languages. Students take assessments in either or both languages. The languages are Spanish and English. The program has grown each year since its inception. “We now have to have a lottery to pick students who can attend those programs,” says Participant Four with great pride.

Participant Four believed “every child, every staff member, every family in the district deserves to feel connected, safe, and welcome”. To that end she has focused on cultural proficiency for every student and every staff member. She defined cultural proficiency as “Policies, practices and behaviors that enable individuals within the district to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment to promote the success of all members of the community,” (P4).

The district provided ongoing training and implementation monitoring through the cultural proficiency council. The council was made up of teachers, administrators, area leaders, and the city chief of police. “The group works with law enforcement to prevent hate crimes and teach staff and students how to work together in harmony,” says Participant Four.

Participant Four advised new and experienced urban superintendents to “work hard for the children, they may not have anyone else in their corner”. She also advises leaders to take time for themselves and for their families. “Being in the spotlight all the time can take its toll if you don’t reenergize,” (P4).

### **Participant Five**

Participant Five was the youngest and least experienced of the group in this study. She led a district of 45,000 students, the majority of whom were African American (69%). She began her career in research then returned to school to get a teaching degree. She taught middle school Spanish for several years before moving into administration. Before becoming superintendent, a job she did not apply for, she was the director of teacher professional development. “I think my relationship with teachers was a big part of why the mayor selected me to take over for the previous superintendent.”

“It was never part of my plan to be the superintendent, I was happy with my job and I do not like the spotlight,” (P5). The previous superintendent had fired hundreds of teachers and other staff as part of not only budget cuts, but for “job non-performance”. Morale was at an all-time low, local and national media reported. Participant Five admitted she had planned to be the interim superintendent for a few months while a national search was conducted. The city mayor and his council convinced her to sign on full time for at least a three year term.

“I knew the steps we’d already taken and where we needed to go, so I accepted,” says Participant Five. “I am totally committed to reform,” she says. Participant Five was the right hand to the superintendent when it came to the teacher evaluation reform system. She helped develop this accountability system that ties student progress to teacher evaluation. If students do not make enough progress over a period of three years, the teacher is not rehired.

“I’m a patient worker and relationship building is my greatest strength,” says Participant Five. She spends much of her time working with the mayor’s office and community groups, rather than with teachers or principals. There were more than 1,000 community organizations and

thousands of volunteers who provided support for students and staff in this district, according to the district website.

“All our children, regardless of background or circumstance, can achieve at the highest level,” said Participant Five. “It is my job to make that happen.” Participant Five has dealt with serious challenges in her district every day. During the week she was interviewed for this study, a student was shot at one of her high schools, the newspapers were investigating accusations of cheating on the NCLB assessments, and reports indicated truancy was on the rise.

Participant Five had a number of programs in place that have shown over the past three years to have an impact on student achievement. The first on the list was the Impact System that includes the professional development and evaluations system for teachers discussed earlier. Other programs included implementation of a district wide reading and math curriculum, implementation of the common core standards and the implementation of safety standards at all schools in the district.

Participant Five began her career in the district six years ago when the test scores and enrollment were at an all-time low. Her work with teachers, the community, and the mayor’s office brought about stable enrollment, better test scores, and better attendance rates according to national reports. When she took the superintendent positions three years ago, she was dedicated to continuing the changes that had made a difference. During her tenure, attendance had risen, violence in the schools is down, and test scores continue to rise. “We continue to have much work to get done,” says Participant Five.

Participant Five led a district of 45,000 students. Sixty-one percent of the students were economically disadvantaged. Nine percent of the population was English language learners. The financial health of the district continued to be a grave concern. The district had lost 10

million dollars in funding over the previous four years. The district had reached out to private foundations to support for new and innovative programs that support student learning.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to illuminate the exceptionalities and the commonalities of the participants in this study. Each participant had her own skill set, knowledge base and challenges. The vignettes were designed to provide a richer understanding of these cases. The information was gathered from state departments of education, the Council of Great City Schools, school websites, telephone interviews and professional journals.

Chapter five provides the findings of this study. Each section in the chapter addressed the components of the challenges in leadership and change women urban superintendents encounter as they support increased student achievement in their respective districts. Chapter 5 addressed the data collected while Chapter six summarizes the results of this study.

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

Women are remarkably underrepresented in the office of superintendent across the country. At the same time, women represent over 70% of education positions (Glass, & Franceschini, 2007). In spite of notable challenges in reaching the top educational leadership positions, there are women who have successfully navigated the system to reach the superintendency. Some of these women are chief executives in large urban districts. Their leadership for change in tough, demanding, highly political urban settings is worthy of investigation. This chapter analyzed the data collected from five women urban superintendents who have successfully traversed the rough waters of urban school districts.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand and interpret how female urban leaders use skills in leadership for change to create student success. Studying and documenting the challenging experiences women encounter as they attempt to create and maintain sustained systemic increase in student achievement in the urban setting provides practical information for many leaders in education administration. This study was unique in that it focused on selected women urban superintendents from across the country, who were members of the Council of Great City Schools with at least three years tenure in the superintendent position in their current district. Other studies have focused on women who worked in particular geographic regions, were state superintendents of schools, or had commonalities in career paths. This study differs from others because it looks at five women urban superintendents from across the country who fit a set criteria.



This chapter addresses the following research questions:

### **Main Research Question**

What patterns exist in the perceptions of urban female superintendents with respect to the challenges of leadership and change?

### **Research Sub Questions**

1. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' practices from a leadership perspective?
2. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' use of change theory practices for improving student achievement?
3. What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenges participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency?

### **Presentation of Data**

The data in this study were presented in table form and narrative text. Definitions of concepts were included in the tables for ease of understanding. The three main codes (leadership, change, and challenge) were defined by information gained from the literature review. The fourth main code, emerging topics, was established based on reoccurring common ideas the participants shared in their interviews that were not addressed in the literature. Sub codes were also defined within each table with examples from the interview scripts. Direct quotes were used to provide clarity and a more detailed description of the repeating patterns. The patterns were derived from the reoccurring concepts obvious in the similar comments of the participants. Related concepts were summarized and tallied to indicate the number of participants expressing

like perceptions. The tallies indicate the common perceptions across participant responses, rather than the strength or the importance of a particular concept.

### **Procedures for Analyzing the Data**

Typical data analysis includes collecting; organizing, generating categories, patterns, and themes; and testing emerging understandings (Marshall, Rossman, 1999). The following sections include descriptions of analysis for interpretation of interview data.

### **Interview Analysis**

Numerous documents were collected relating to each of the five participants and their districts. State departments of education were searched for pertinent information with regards to leadership and change challenges in each district. Published documents from the Council of Great City Schools organization were reviewed and collected to provide a deeper understanding of commonalities and uniquenesses of the participants. District websites provided rich data mines including published interviews, written articles, strategic plans, district newsletters, superintendent blogs, and other documents critical for this study. These documents were used to interpret what was found in the interview data.

Managing the data was based on the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter one. The data were coded and analyzed using the six dimensions of leadership, the five dimensions of change and the seven dimensions of education challenge (Reeves, 2007), (Knostner & Thousand, 2000), (Texas Education Agency, 2007). Emerging categories not captured by the theoretical framework were also identified and analyzed as a main coding category. The following definitions describe the main coding categories.

## Main Interview Coding Categories

**Leadership:** Doug Reeves, (2007) described leadership as having six components:

communication, vision, relationships, building capacity in others, accessing the expertise of others, and decision-making. Each of these components is defined in Table 6 and constitutes the sub codes for this main code.

**Change:** Knoster and Thousand (2000) defined the five attributes that must be present for change to take place. These attributes are: vision, skills, incentives, resources, and an action plan. Each attribute is further defined in Table 7 and constitutes the sub codes for this main code.

**Challenges:** Challenge is defined as demanding or stimulating experience. The Texas Education Agency (2007) has defined the leading challenges superintendent encounter. Each challenge is further defined in Table 8 and constitutes the sub codes for this main code.

**Emerging Themes:** Reoccurring topics that emerged that did not fit into the Leadership, Change or Challenges categories. They are defined in Table 9 and constitute the sub codes for this main code.

**Table 7 Main Interview Coding Categories**

### Main Interview Coding Categories

L	C	CH	E
Leadership	Change Attributes	Challenges	Emerging Theme
(L1) Communication	(C1) Vision	(CH1) All Student Achievement	(E1) Social Justice
(L2) Vision	(C2) Skills	(CH2) Achievement Gap	(E2) Experience

<b>(L3)</b> Relationships	<b>(C3)</b> Incentives	<b>(CH3)</b> Represent the Population of the District	<b>(E3)</b> Attitude
<b>(L4)</b> Building Capacity in Others	<b>(C4)</b> Resources	<b>(CH4)</b> Effective Governance	<b>(E4)</b> Data Analysis/Assessment/ Evaluation
<b>(L5)</b> Access the Expertise of Others	<b>(C5)</b> Action Plan	<b>(CH5)</b> Financial Constraints	<b>(E5)</b> Factors Affecting Decision to become Superintendent
<b>(L6)</b> Decision Making		<b>(CH6)</b> Build Consensus to Achieve Collaborative Goals	<b>(E6)</b> Advice for Leaders/ Accomplishment
		<b>(CH7)</b> Value Diversity	<b>(E7)</b> Accomplishments
			<b>(E8)</b> Advice for Leaders

Leadership is commitment and persistence in moving everyone towards the same goals (Reeves, 2007). Leadership has six attributes according to Reeves (2007). These attributes include: communication (L1), vision (L2), relationships (L3), building capacity in others (L4), accessing the expertise of others (L5), and decision making (L6). Participants were interviewed about their leadership in these specific areas. The definitions used in this table are paraphrased

from Reeves' (2007) work. The researcher used exact quotes from the participants as examples in the sub code table.

**Table 8 Leadership Sub Codes With Definitions from Data Set**

**Leadership Sub Codes With Definitions from Data Set**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Leadership Attribute</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Data Example from Interview Transcript</b>
<b>L1</b>	Communication	The interchange of thoughts and ideas	<i>"I think interacting with students and the community is an important communication piece for me" P2</i>
<b>L2</b>	Vision	That which will come to be-the overarching goal	<i>"To be completely focused on student success, and support for teachers so they can ultimately help students be successful." P1</i>
<b>L3</b>	Relationships	Connection, involvement, association with others	<i>"I've got a lot of relationships with the people through various organizations I'm involved in." P2</i>
<b>L4</b>	Build Capacity in Others	Create more skills and abilities in others	<i>"The opportunity to learn and to share ideas makes everybody smarter." P5</i>
<b>L5</b>	Access Expertise of Others	Get information from those who have extensive knowledge in the area	<i>"I look to the Council for the latest, best expert advice." P5</i>
<b>L6</b>	Decision Making	Process for deciding what to do	<i>"First, I gather all the information I can, I ask the experts then make the decisions." P2</i>

Change is defined by Fullan (2009) as new understandings, beliefs, behaviors and new materials. The following table shows the main code change with sub codes vision (C1), skills (C2), incentives (C3), resources (C4), and action plan (C5). Each of the participants responded to interview questions related to these sub code areas. Each sub code area's definitions are paraphrased from the work of Fullan (2009) and Knoster, Villa & Thousand (2000) (see Appendix E). Participants' exact quotes were used as examples.

**Table 9 Change Sub Codes With definitions from Data Set**

**Change Sub Codes With Definitions from Data Set**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Change Attribute</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Data Example from Interview Transcript</b>
<b>C1</b>	Vision	That which will be the goal or result of change	<i>"Our students will graduate ready for college or careers." P1</i>
<b>C2</b>	Skills	New skills to meet the new expectation	<i>"We had to develop new instructional skills to meet our students' needs." P5</i>
<b>C3</b>	Incentives	Something that incites greater productivity	<i>"We have a merit pay type plan in place to reward successful teachers and principals." P1</i>
<b>C4</b>	Resources	References and materials to successfully complete the new task	<i>"You can't sustain change without the right resources" P5</i>
<b>C5</b>	Action Plan	Steps to take to reach the new desired goal	<i>"We have specific steps in place to reach our goals". P1</i>

The table below shows the sub codes of challenge attributes and definitions based on the research done by the Texas Education Agency (2007) in their publication *Effective Attributes Profile*. The sub code definitions are paraphrased from this body of research. The sub codes include all student achievement (CH1), achievement gaps (CH2), represent the population served by the district (CH3), effective governance (CH4), financial constraints (CH5), build consensus to achieve collaborative goals (CH6), and value diversity (CH7). Data examples are exact quotes from participant interviews.

**Table 10 Challenges Sub Codes With Definitions from Data Set**

**Challenge Sub Codes With Definitions from Data Set**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Challenges Attributes</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Data Example from Interview Transcript</b>
<b>CH1</b>	All Student Achievement	NCLB mandates all students achieve at proficient level base on state assessments	<i>“We’ve seen an increase in our overall achievement because of our programs.” P4</i>
<b>CH2</b>	Achievement Gaps	Achievement levels for minority, low income, and non- English speaking students compared to White middle and upper class students	<i>“I also, instituted a strategy; we put the AVID Program in every middle and high school, that was 87 schools.” P1</i>  (The AVID program is Advancement Via Individual Determination; a program that provides supports to middle and high school students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to do college prep work.)
<b>CH3</b>	Represent the population served by the district	Each urban school district serves a diverse group of	<i>“We’re a diverse community.” P2</i>

		students	
<b>CH4</b>	Efficient Governance	How the school board of education/ board of trustees govern the school district	<i>“My primary responsibility is to the board making sure they have the information so things run smoothly.” P1</i>
<b>CH5</b>	Financial Constraints	Funding for school districts continue to be an issue in a diverse student population. The financial cuts since the 2008 downturn in the economy have hit school districts hard.	<i>“We’ve had a 19 million dollar cut over the two years”.</i>
<b>CH6</b>	Build consensus to achieve collaborative goals	Lead in such a way that the majority of staff, the board, and the community support and work toward the district’s goals.	<i>“One of the things that has been a major hallmark of my superintendency has been to break down the silos. So everybody works together. It’s such a critical thing and it’s one of the things we’ve been doing substantial work on.” P1</i>
<b>CH7</b>	Value Diversity	Support and value all students, regardless of race, language, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.	<i>“We have more minority and poverty children being successful in Advance Placement courses. Those kids are getting higher grades, being more successful. To know that 10% more of our at-risk males were staying in school was a rewarding accomplishment.” P1</i>

The sub codes for emerging codes are represented in the table below. Emerging codes were reoccurring themes that emerged as the data were analyzed. The sub codes in this area included: social justice (E1), experience (E2), attitude (E3), data analysis/assessment/evaluation (E4),



factors affecting the decision to serve as superintendent (E5), and advice for other leaders (E6).

The data examples are exact quotes from the interview transcripts.

**Table 11 Sub Codes With Definitions from Data**

**Sub Codes With Definitions from Data**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Emerging Code</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Data Example from Interview Transcript</b>
<b>E1</b>	Social Justice	The idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity that understands and values human rights.	<i>“I knew I had a board who had a solid passion for social justice for all kids.” P2</i>
<b>E2</b>	Experience	Personally encountering or undergoing something.	<i>“I’ve been in the district a long time, people know me, I was a teacher, then a principal, and various other administrative positions”. P2</i>
<b>E3</b>	Attitude	The way a person views or behaves towards an experience, often in an evaluative way.	<i>“Reading is my first passion so I taught that.” P1</i>
<b>E4</b>	Data Analysis/Assessment/Evaluation	Reporting, evaluating, charting, and interpreting data to make decisions.	<i>“We constantly look at our data and that gives you an indication about how successful you are.” P1</i>
<b>E5</b>	Factors Affecting the Decision to Serve as Superintendent	Dynamics that influenced each participant to accept the superintendent position in her current district	<i>“Well, initially, I didn’t have an interest but the superintendent left in September and there was really not a lot of others ready to take that position.” P2</i>
<b>E6</b>	Advice for Other Leaders	Recommendations for other urban superintendents.	<i>“You know the awards and rewards come when you do your best for kids”. P2</i>

The tables just presented were reanalyzed after revisiting the complete data set. The researcher continued to review and revise the coding categories, making appropriate revisions as the data revealed the need for updates. The researcher reread the interview transcripts and reviewed the superintendents' artifacts. Notes in the margins were reviewed as well. The data analysis consisted of reading, classifying, describing, and interpreting the pieces of data. The coding process broke the data into separate pieces. Syntheses of the data involved assembling the fragmented data together to construct patterns. Key themes and ideas related to superintendents' experiences with challenges, leadership, and change began to emerge. In the final analysis, the researcher examines the intersection between leadership and change as they both relate to the defined challenges superintendents encounter.

Consideration was given to the units of data that could not be coded using the analytic framework. All but a small percent of data were accounted for in the coded data. The data that did not fit into the framework were anecdotal information exclusive to individual participants. The researcher deemed these data unrelated to challenges in leadership and change experienced by female urban superintendents. For example one participant discussed her plans to spend time traveling with family when she retired at the end of the year. This is the kind of data deemed unrelated to the topic of this study. The coding involved a second coder to establish consensus and credibility as described in Chapter three.

Within the main code several sub codes surfaced. Social justice was an obvious sub code. The data showed patterns of participants creating an institution based on equality and human rights. Experience was another emerging theme sub coding category that did not fit into any other classification. The participants had common experiences that were separate from the three main coding categories. Attitude, or personal views (often in an evaluative way), developed as

the third sub code in the emerging codes category. A fourth sub coding area that developed was data analysis/assessment/evaluation. This sub coding category was present in each of the data sets in some form. The fifth sub coding area under emerging codes was factors affecting the decision to serve as superintendent. The uniqueness of four of the five participants being selected from within the district without applying for the position made this sub coding section necessary. The final sub coding category for emerging codes is advice for other leaders. This emerging theme sub category provided insight from each of the participants. Each of the patterns and themes will be discussed in full following the presentation of the data.

“Data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data,” (Marshall, Rossman, 1999, p. 150). The order and structure of these data were coded by main and sub codes to analyze by the smallest bit of data. The following data matrix was used to determine common patterns and subsequent themes encountered by women urban superintendents.

### **Patterns for the Sub Codes of Leadership**

Each participant either quoted precisely the district’s vision or paraphrased it with accuracy. The common threads included statements about all students achieving, closing the achievement gaps, learning, instruction, college and career ready, fiscally responsible, excellence, and highest performing district (in the state, in the country). Each participant had no difficulty in articulating the vision for their district. Reeves (2006) states “The first obligation of leadership is to articulate a compelling vision”, (p. 34).

The analysis of the data showed that all the participants believed that communication is critical to their success. They identified speaking engagements and interviews as common patterns of communication. Another pattern found in the data was that all the participants

reported that relationships were crucial to their success. All five participants made some reference to their strength in building relationships.

All five participants reported building capacity as important to their work to increase student achievement. The participants named training, collaboration, and professional development as ways they build capacity in others.

The five participants shared ways they access the expertise of others. The most common pattern for this group of participants was accessing the research publications and expert researchers at the Council of Great City Schools. Closely tied to accessing the expertise of others was decision making. The participants reported that they most often include others, typically the experts in making decisions. An interesting note was that two of the five participants included the mayor or mayor’s office in the major district decisions.

**Table 12 Patterns for the Sub Codes of Leadership**

**Patterns for the Sub Codes of Leadership**

<b>Main Code: Leadership Attributes</b>	<b>Patterns</b>	<b>Evidence (examples from transcripts)</b>
<p><b>L1 Communication</b></p> <p>Definition: The interchange of thoughts and ideas</p>	<p>All participants (5 of 5) identified communication as a critical part of leadership.</p>	<p><i>“Communication is so critical to the success of the district.” P2</i></p>
	<p>5 of 5 participants identified public speaking/interviews as one of the most common ways they communicate.</p>	<p><i>“I speak a lot. I’m interviewed often. I email and I’m on the phone constantly.” P5</i></p>
<p><b>L2 Vision</b></p> <p>Definition: That which will come to be-the overarching goal.</p>	<p>All participants (5 of 5) paraphrased or quoted the district vision.</p>	<p><i>“...provide ALL students, I mean ALL, with a high quality education.” P5</i></p>
	<p>All five participants indicated closing the achievement gaps and overall student achievement were part of the district vision.</p>	<p><i>“Meeting the needs of each child, closing the gaps is part of our vision.” P4</i></p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>L3</b> <b>Relationships</b></p> <p>Definition: Connection, involvement, association with others</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants said relationships were critical to their work.</p>	<p><i>“Ah, relationships make all the difference.” P1</i></p>
	<p>5 of 5 participants said relationship building was one of their strengths.</p>	<p><i>“Building relationship is one of my strengths.” P3</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>L4</b> <b>Building Capacity in Others</b></p> <p>Definition: Create more skills and abilities in others.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants said building capacity in others as important to their work</p>	<p><i>“Oh, it’s just critical to keep the adults growing/learning.”</i> <i>P2</i></p>
	<p>4 of 5 participants identified formal professional development plans as a way they develop capacity in other district leaders.</p>	<p><i>“We have an administrators’ P.D. plan in place so we can develop capacity in our leaders.”</i> <i>P2</i></p>
	<p>3 of 5 identified significant change in how building capacity in others has changed since their tenure began. The collaborative learning from each other was pivotal in realizing the necessary change.</p>	<p><i>“I bring them in and we learn together, you know collaboratively, that’s different form the past.” P1</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>L5</b> <b>Access the Expertise of Others</b></p> <p>Definition: Get information from those who have extensive knowledge in the area.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants shared ways they access the expertise of others.</p>	<p><i>“I need the expertise of others who have studied the subject so I call them in and see what they have to say” P2</i></p>
	<p>4 of 5 participants identified the Council of Great City Schools as a source to access expertise</p>	<p><i>“I lean on the Council for the latest research”. P2</i></p> <p><i>“The Council is a great source, their publications and just access to other members”. P4</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>L6</b> <b>Decision Making</b></p> <p>Definition: Process for deciding what to do.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants shared they most often include others in their decision making</p>	<p><i>“First, I gather all the information I can. I ask the experts then I make the decision.” P2</i></p>
	<p>3 of 5 participants worked closely with the city mayor and often the city council when making district decisions.</p>	<p><i>“I’m in regular, constant contact with the mayor and council to determine decisions.” P5</i></p>

	3 of the 5 participants worked closely with boards when making “big” decisions.	<i>“I have a great board; I keep them informed so they can make decisions.” P2</i>
	2 of the 5 worked more closely with the mayor/city council than with the district board. The school board or board of trustees was less influential than were the mayor/city council.	<i>“The mayor and his folks have a significant effect on this district”. P5</i>

**Patterns for the Sub Code Change**

The following table represents the sub codes for change. Each of the attribute’s definitions was paraphrased from the work of Fullan (2009) and Knoster, Villa & Thousand (2000). Each of the five participants responded to interview questions related to these sub codes. One pattern the data revealed with respect to vision was that all participants articulated their vision for change. The vision for change was based on the district’s overarching vision of student achievement. Patterns in the sub code skills included plans for building new skills to meet the change expectations. Five of the five participants shared that training (practicing new skills), professional development (learning new skills), and collaborating plans were necessary for change.

The sub code of incentives was not a strong pattern. The participants were less than enthusiastic when asked about incentives for change. None of the participants reported that incentives were of great importance. Resources and action plans were high on the participants’ list of important areas to address. All five participants agreed that resources were critical as was the need for an action plan.

**Table 13 Patterns for Sub Codes in Change**

**Patterns Sub Codes in Change**

<b>Main Code: Change</b>	<b>Patterns</b>	<b>Evidence (examples from transcripts)</b>
<p><b>C1 Vision</b> Definition: That which will come to be the overarching goal.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants articulated their vision for change.</p>	<p><i>“We have to provide supports in whatever way we need to, to make sure all kids learn” P3</i></p>
	<p>5 of the 5 participants indicated the foundation for the vision for change was addressing social justice issues.</p>	<p><i>“We had to get some basic things in place for kids who were not participating in their education.” P4</i></p>
<p><b>C2 Skills</b> Definition: New skills to meet the new expectations.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants shared plans to develop new skills needed to implement change.</p>	<p><i>“It all has to do with trying new instructional strategies.” P3</i></p>
	<p>5 of 5 participants shared that training (practicing new skills), professional development (learning new skills), and collaboration were a major part of developing new skills.</p>	<p><i>“We do training, collaboration and learning communities to build skills.” P5</i></p>
<p><b>C3 Incentives</b> Definition: Something that incites greater productivity.</p>	<p>4 of 5 participants said there was some kind of incentive program in place to reward change. None of the 5 participants indicated incentives were of great importance.</p>	<p><i>“We have a merit pay type plan in place to reward successful teachers and principals.” P1</i></p>
<p><b>C4 Resources</b> Definition: References and materials to successfully complete the new task.</p>	<p>5 of the 5 participants agreed resources were critical to successful change in their district.</p>	<p><i>“You just have to have the right resources to sustain anything new and innovative.” P4</i></p>
	<p>3 of 5 participants indicated they had grant money from private sources to provide resources needed for change.</p>	<p><i>“We have a significant grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to provide resources for change.” P1</i></p>
<p><b>C5 Action Plan</b> Definition: Steps to take to reach the new goal.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants articulated their action plan for change.</p>	<p><i>“First, I talk to people and figure out where we are, then I inform my board, then my principals...It depends on what the change is then I figure out what actions I need to follow to get things done”. P2</i></p>

## **Patterns for the Sub Code Challenges**

Challenges in the superintendency were defined by the Texas Education Agency in the research publication *Effective Attributes Profile* (2007). This agency defined the primary challenges superintendents face. The research was done in large and small districts throughout Texas over a period of four years. The agency summarized each major challenge. Those challenges are paraphrased in the table below.

The sub codes include: all student achievement, achievement gaps, represent the population of the district, effective governance, financial constraints, building consensus to achieve collaborative goals, and value diversity. The participants reported these challenges as they were interviewed.

Certain patterns emerged as the data were analyzed. Student achievement and achievement gaps were strong patterns. All the participants agreed both these sub coded areas were their primary focus. Each of the five had plans and programs in place to address achievement overall, as well as achievement gaps.

Each of the participants discussed the diverse populations they serve. The populations of the five districts were very different. Some districts had large numbers of wealthy and poor students. Some districts had very high levels of English language learners (ELL), while others had a low number of ELL students. There were no credible patterns in this sub code area.

All five participants addressed effective governance. They shared ways they keep their boards informed. There were no common patterns in approaches to effective governance.

Financial constraints were identified by every participant as having a great impact on their district. They reported that the speed in which they could effect change was negatively impacted



by the loss of funding in recent years. Four of the participants reported receiving substantial funding for special programs from private grants.

Five of the five participants stated they believe collaboration among staff, the board, and the community was a critical part of their work. Likewise, all the participants stated the value of the diversity of their community. They all felt the district’s diversity was a great strength. The table below represents the patterns for the sub codes for challenge.

**Table 14 Sub Codes for Challenges**

**Sub Codes for Challenges**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Patterns</b>	<b>Evidence (examples from transcripts)</b>
<b>CH</b>		
<b>CH1</b> <b>All Student Achievement</b> Definition: NCLB mandates all students achieve at proficient levels based on state assessments.	5 of 5 participants indicated student achievement was their primary focus.	<i>“Well, student achievement, that’s the heart of our work, isn’t it.” P4</i>
	5 of 5 participants have seen a gain in student achievement based on state AYP assessments since their tenure began.	<i>“We’ve had good growth in student achievement during my tenure.” P3</i>
<b>CH 2</b> <b>Achievement Gap</b> Definition: Achievement levels for minority, low income, limited English and non-English speaking students compared to White middle and upper class students.	5 of 5 participants articulated the challenge and focus on achievement gaps.	<i>“You know, the truth gets lost in averages, so we have to have a laser focus on our gaps.” P4</i>
	5 of 5 participants had plans in place for addressing achievement gaps.	<i>“We have a department with detailed plans to address our gaps.” P4</i>
<b>CH3</b> <b>Represent the Population of the District</b> Definition: Each urban school district serves a diverse group of students.	5 of 5 participants shared the population represented in their particular district.	<i>“We are a very diverse district. From the very poor, inner city, minority kids to the wealthy kids to the 90 languages spoken.” P2</i>

<p align="center"><b>CH 4</b></p> <p align="center"><b>Effective Governance</b></p> <p>Definition: How the school board of education/board of trustees governs the school district.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants discussed their part in the effectiveness of their board.</p>	<p><i>“My primary responsibility is to the board, make sure they have the information and things run smoothly so my people can get things done.” P1</i></p>
	<p>There was no common approach to how the participants worked with their board.</p>	<p><i>“The mayor’s office is deeply involved with the work of our board.” P5</i></p>
<p align="center"><b>CH 5</b></p> <p align="center"><b>Financial Constraints</b></p> <p>Definition: Funding for school districts continues to be an issue in a diverse student population setting. The financial cuts since the 2008 downturn in the economy has impacted school districts in negative ways.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants shared the impact of budget cuts have had on their district.</p>	<p><i>“We’ve have a 19 million dollar cut over the last two years.” P2</i></p> <p><i>“What they told me basically was we want to reorganize to save jobs, don’t fire anybody and rethink everything that we are doing to become more efficient.” P1</i></p>
	<p>4 of 5 participants have furloughed staff during their tenure, due to budget cuts.</p>	<p><i>“We had to do some restructuring people lost jobs.”P3</i></p>
	<p>4 of 5 participants indicated the financial constraints have slowed the speed in which they have been able to make changes to increase student achievement.</p>	<p><i>“You know you just can’t move with the speed you need to when your resources are cut year after year.” P5</i></p>
	<p>5 of 5 participants have at least 2 major (^\$1,000,000) private grants that supports their vision for change.</p>	<p><i>We’ve been fortunate to have substantial funding from the Wallace Foundation and the Gates Foundation.” P4</i></p>
<p align="center"><b>CH6</b></p> <p align="center"><b>Building Consensus to Achieve Collaborative Goals</b></p> <p>Definition: Lead in such a way that the majority of staff, the board, and the community support and work toward the district’s goals.</p>	<p>5 of 5 participants stated they believe collaboration among groups, including staff, the board, and the community was paramount to achievement gains.</p>	<p><i>“I work with many groups in the community, within the schools, and with the board to bring about the changes that make a difference for kids”. P2</i></p>
	<p>5 of 5 participants are involved in civic and community organizations that helps build collaboration between the district and the community</p>	<p><i>“I’ve been involved in the community for years, they know me, they know what I’m for and what I’m against.” P1</i></p>
<p align="center"><b>CH7</b></p> <p align="center"><b>Value Diversity</b></p>	<p>5 of 5 participants shared the value of diversity in their district.</p>	<p><i>“Our diversity is our richness, our strength”. P4</i></p>

Definition: Support and value all students, regardless of race, language, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.		
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**Patterns for the Sub Code Emerging Codes**

During the course of collecting data emerging codes began to develop. These themes did not fit into any other main code or sub category. The definitions for these sub codes are defined by the researcher with the exception of social justice. The definition for social justice was paraphrased from the work of Goodman (2011).

Social justice was a reoccurring pattern interwoven in all the answers participants provided in the interviews. E1 social justice was a strong pattern. Each of the five participants gave examples of social justice issues they addressed in the district. Safety, equal access to education, and valuing human rights was appeared in many of the answers to interview questions.

Each of the participants shared experiences that supported their work as superintendents. A common pattern was that each participant valued their experience as teachers. Attitude was a strong reoccurring pattern that was revealed throughout the interview analysis. They had a strong belief in the work they were doing evidenced by the excitement in their voices and comments about their work.

Data analysis/assessment/evaluation was a pattern that emerged from the data. The superintendents all used data analysis/assessment/evaluation as part of their work, but were removed from the actual collection and analysis. They received the information from their staff on a regular basis. The superintendents used the information gathered and analyzed to make decisions.

Factors affecting the decision to become superintendent offered interesting patterns. Four of the five participants interviewed did not apply or seek the position. Each of these four women

was recruited from within their own district. Each of the four agreed to take the position on an interim basis while a suitable candidate could be found. After much consideration, these four women decided to take the position on a permanent basis. One participant reported she was “simply tired of seeing people run through the office every two years” (P2). One participant was selected from another district after a national search.

The final emerging sub code is advice for other leaders. Each of the five participants joyfully gave advice for aspiring leaders and leaders who are already serving in the position. The common patterns were “never give up,” “watch how you react to things, everyone is watching you”, and “you are always in the spotlight”, (P5)

The table below represents the patterns in each of the sub codes for the emerging category.

**Table 15 Patterns for the Sub Code Emerging Themes**

**Patterns for the Sub Code Emerging Themes**

<b>Emerging Themes E</b>	<b>Patterns</b>	<b>Evidence (examples from transcripts)</b>
<p><b>Social Justice</b> <b>E1</b> Definition: The idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity that understands and values human rights. (Goodman, 2011)</p>	5 of 5 participants indicated numerous ways they create and support the principles of equality for all students.	<p><i>“It’s really about students feeling safe so they can learn.” P2</i></p> <p><i>“You have to help the community understand where kids come from and that they need programs/attention to make the playing field level.”P3</i></p>
	5 of 5 participants indicated ways they represent kids who have no voice.	<i>“I’m an advocate for all kids.” P1</i>
	5 of 5 participants shared programs they have implemented to support learning for underrepresented students.	<i>“We implemented our language program to support students and families who would otherwise have very little connection to learning in our schools.” P4</i>
<p><b>Experience</b> <b>E2</b> Definition: Personally encountering or undergoing</p>	5 of 5 participants shared personal experiences that have had an impact on the way they lead.	<i>“My years in the classroom have served me well, I value those experiences.” P2</i>

something.		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Attitude</b> <b>E3</b></p> <p>Definition: The way a person views or behaves towards an experience, often in an evaluative way.</p>	5 of 5 participants expressed a positive attitude about the work they do.	<i>“We have important work to do and we can get it done.” P4</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Data Analysis/Assessment/ Evaluation</b> <b>E4</b></p> <p>Definition: Reporting, evaluating, charting, and interpreting data to make decisions.</p>	5 of 5 participants indicated they have systems in place to analyze and interpret data for decision making.	<i>“I keep up with the data. That tells me where we are and where we need to move.” P4</i>  <i>“Our new teacher evaluation system will tell us why we are getting the results we’re getting.” P5</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Factors Affecting Decision to Become Superintendent</b> <b>E5</b></p> <p>Definition: Dynamics that influenced each participant to accept the superintendent position in her current district.</p>	4 of 5 participants indicated they did not pursue the office of the superintendent in their present district.	<i>“This job was never on my radar, I did not pursue it.” P5</i>
	4 of 5 participants were drafted to take the superintendency from within their own district.	<i>“People were tired of the parade of superintendents marching through the office every 2 or 3 years. They told me, you have to take it.” P3</i>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Advice for Leaders</b> <b>E6</b></p> <p>Definition: Recommendations/guidance for others either in the superintendency or aspiring to the superintendency.</p>	5 of 5 participants shared advice for other leaders.	<i>“Always do your best work and watch how you react to things.” P1</i>
	5 of 5 participants discussed the lack of a private life.	<i>“You are always in the spotlight, nothing is private, you have to always be on your best behavior.” P5</i>
	4 of the 5 participants advised others to find a peer group of leaders for support.	<i>“I found I had no peers to talk to about my work so I had to look to the other superintendents in the Council to find support”. P2</i>

**Themes that Emerged from the Intersection of Leadership, Change, Challenges, and Emerging Codes.**

Through the process of analyzing the patterns across all main codes, four major themes emerged. These themes were the intersection of leadership, change, challenges, and the emerging codes that developed throughout the data analysis. These four major themes are shown in the table below. They are discussed in length in Chapter six.

**Table 16 Themes Emerging from the Intersection of Leadership, Change, Challenges, and Emerging Theme**

<b>Themes Emerging from the Intersection of Leadership, Change, Challenges and Emerging Codes</b>
<p>1. The district vision is the superintendent’s driving force for change in urban school districts.</p> <p><b>L2, L6, C1, C5, CH1, CH2, E1</b></p>
<p>2. The superintendent’s commitment to social justice is critical to support change in urban school districts.</p> <p><b>L2, C1, C4, C5, CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4, CH6, CH7, E1, E2, E5</b></p>
<p>3. The superintendent’s relationships and communication with staff and the community are critical supports for change in urban school districts.</p> <p><b>L1, L2, L3, C1, CH1, CH2, CH3, CH4, CH5, CH6, CH7, E1, E2, E3, E5</b></p>
<p>4. The superintendent’s attention to leadership and change attributes are important in bringing about change to increase student achievement.</p> <p><b>L 1-6, C 1-5, CH1, CH2, E1, E3</b></p>

**Summary**

The data collected for this study included two interview sessions with the five participants. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were reviewed and coded. The coding was checked by a second coder. The researcher also collected news articles, vitas,

biographies, newsletters, and reviewed district websites and television interviews. These documents were reviewed to confirm or refute information provided in the interviews. The documents were cross checked to get an accurate picture of each participant and her district.

After the interviews were coded and reviewed they were analyzed by main coding area. Once the main coding was accomplished, the bits of data were assigned to sub code areas and analyzed for common patterns. The patterns were reviewed and analyzed for common themes across all participants. This chapter provides the analysis of the data. Chapter six provides answers to the main and sub research questions. It also provides a summary of the entire study.

## **CHAPTER 6-SUMMARY**

### **Introduction**

Previous research on women in the superintendency was limited to groups of women in certain geographical regions, or career paths women in the superintendency take who aspire to the top district position. There have also been case studies of women of certain ethnicities who served as superintendents. There is little or no research on leadership and change challenges of urban female superintendents. This study examined the leadership and change challenges urban female superintendents encounter. “Leadership is about change -how to justify it, implement it, and maintain it,” (Reeves, 2009, p 44). The women studied here, confirmed Reeves premise.

This study provided insight into the perceptions of urban female superintendents’ leadership for change. The results of this study were based on the attributes of leadership, the attributes of change and the challenges, from themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. This chapter summarizes the patterns and themes that developed from that data analysis.

Based on the views of the participants in this study, four themes emerged that addressed the main research questions and the sub research questions. The themes were the attention to the district vision, the foundational importance of addressing social justice issues, the critical nature of building and supporting relationships, and the superintendents’ awareness and use of the leadership and change attributes defined in the research of Fullan and Reeves. This chapter discusses each research question along with sections on the significance of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future studies.

### **Discussion of Research Sub Question One**

**What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants’ practices from a leadership perspective?**



This study affirmed the six attributes of leadership are critical to the success of urban female superintendents (Reeves, 2007). Each participant discussed communication (L1), vision (L2), relationships (L3), building capacity in others (L4), and decision making (L6), at length. The participants in this study shared examples of their use of these attributes to create the success in increased student achievement. Patterns emerged in each of these areas.

The participants identified communication as “critical” to their work. Each discussed their speaking engagements and interviews with local and national media as important ways they communicate their vision and plans for the district. Each of the five participants quoted or paraphrased the district vision. The vision in each of the five districts studied included increasing student achievement for all students and addressing the achievement gaps.

From a leadership perspective, the participants valued relationships. Each participant stated that relationships were a strong characteristic for them. “Relationships make all the difference,” (P1) is an example of a typical statement by the participants. The participants used their relationships to build capacity in others. From the participants’ viewpoint, providing professional development was critical in building capacity.

From a leadership perspective, the participants shared most decision making by accessing the expertise of others. There were a variety of ways the group accessed expertise. The common pattern, however, was the value each placed on the Council of Great City Schools. This organization is a research and advocacy organization that provides regular publications detailing leadership and change information for urban school leaders.

An unexpected pattern that emerged was the close connection between the superintendent and the city mayors. All five participants discussed the mayor’s involvement in the school

district. Two superintendents reported a very close tie with the mayor's office in terms of shared decision making.

### **Discussion of Research Sub Question Two**

#### **What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' use of change theory practices for improving student achievement?**

The findings of this study confirmed the work of Fullan (2009) and Knoster, Villa and Thousand (2000). Vision (C1), skill (C2), incentives (C3), resources (C4), and an action plan (C5) all play a critical role in bringing about sustainable change in schools (Fullan, 2009). Fullan called it a "moral imperative to close the gaps in student achievement" (p.169). The participants in this study agreed that each of these attributes were important to creating and sustaining the kind of change expected and needed in their district. Each attribute was discussed with about equal enthusiasm and detail with the only exception being incentives (C3). While some participants talked about incentives, they did not identify common ways incentives support change in their districts. Two participants completely discounted incentives.

Each of the participants articulated a vision for change based on the overarching district vision. The participants had action plans in place to address building skills and to provide resources necessitated by the change. Vision was more than a skill. For these women it was their fundamental belief. It was their "marching orders" to accomplish great things for all students in their districts. Each participant knew the district vision without pause and spoke about it with passion.

The participants addressed critical budget constraints that called for outside funding sources to provide skill building and resources to facilitate changes expected in the district. A common pattern emerged that all but one superintendent had acquired large grants to fund the changes.

The Gates Foundation and the Wallace Foundation supported change in four of the five districts studied.

### **Discussion of Research Sub Question Three**

#### **What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenges participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency?**

The Texas Education Agency (2007) identified six major challenges superintendents encounter. Among these were: all student achievement (CH1), achievement gaps (CH2), representing the population of the district (CH3), effective governance (CH4), financial constraints (CH5), and building consensus to achieve collaborative goals (CH6). Each of the participants indicated that student achievement for all students, as well as addressing the gaps in achievement for poor and minority children, were their primary focus. The participants' concentration on these two challenges encompassed all the leadership and change attributes. The challenges of financial constraints and building consensus to achieve collaborative goals were interwoven into the leading for student achievement.

Patterns that emerged with respect to representing the population of the district were limited to acknowledgment of a very diverse population within each district and participation in civic and community groups. While each participant discussed her part in effective governance, there was no common approach.

### **Response to Main Research Question**

#### **What patterns exist in the perceptions of urban female superintendents with respect to the challenges of leadership and change?**

This study found that the superintendents' attention to leadership and change attributes were important in bringing about change to increase student achievement. The specific strategies

superintendents reported as most critical are relationships, communication, and vision. Each superintendent interviewed reported strengths in these areas. All five women articulated the district overall vision as well as their own vision for change in the district. The superintendents' attention to leadership and change attributes were important to bringing about change to increase student achievement -the lynchpin of the districts' success.

One commonality among all five participants was the discussion of social justice issues with respect to leading change for student success. Each participant discussed policy, linguistic, social, and health issues that did not allow for equal access to education for all students in their individual districts. One participant changed policies in order to provide a safe environment for all students by establishing policies and practices that included gay, lesbian, and transgender rights in the district's non-discrimination policy. Another participant established a program that would provide support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participants in advanced placement courses, and other college preparation work. Another participant established bilingual elementary schools where all subjects were taught in English and Spanish. This was designed to honor the language and skills of the large Hispanic population who were newcomers to the United States, or were first generation Americans.

Social justice issues were the initial step in leading change to establish sustained increase in student achievement according to the participants in this study. "You cannot move on, until you address the very central issues, of fairness and access to the education system" (P2). While the researcher expected to hear about social justice, she was surprised to find how each participant described social justices as foundational to their leadership for change.

This study yielded four primary themes that could be used to answer the main research question. These themes reflect the intersection of leadership, change and the challenges of the

superintendency. The first theme was that the district vision is the superintendent's driving force for change in the urban school district. The second theme was that the superintendent's commitment to social justice is critical to support change in urban school districts. Theme three was that the superintendent's relationships and communication with staff and the community were critical supports for change in the urban school district. The final theme was that the superintendent's attention to leadership and change attributes was important in bringing about change to increase student achievement. Each of these themes represents learning and implications for practice.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study may have substantial implications for practice for urban school leaders, as well as leaders with significant challenges in student achievement in their school districts. Given the moral and economic imperative for educating all students to be college and career ready, the need for knowledge from successful practitioners about leading for change is crucial. The participants in this study offered a myriad of valuable recommendations.

Superintendents leading for change first need to understand the leadership attributes outlined by Reeves (2007). What is their knowledge and skill in the areas of communication, vision, relationships, building capacity in others, accessing the expertise of others, and decision making? Evaluating, then improving, these skills are critical to creating and sustaining change for increased student achievement. The participants in this study defined their district's vision without pause -a skill that others can certainly develop. The participants in this study all reported that communication and relationships were valued strengths they possessed. Building the capacity in others and accessing the expertise of others were part of the participants'

repertoire of important skills. There were specific examples of each of these attributes in this study.

This study revealed the real life examples of the change attributes that support increased student achievement. The participants in this study revealed that their action plans for change, vision for change, the need for skills, and resources to support change were essential to bring about change to increase student achievement. The participants reported providing incentives as less important than the other attributes.

Each of the participants in this study discussed the challenges they encounter as they lead for change. The exemplar examples found in the data tables and restated in the narrative shed light on the importance of each of these challenges and how to overcome them. Some of the examples detailed particular programs that address student achievement gaps and (all) student achievement. Other examples provided solutions for budget constraints and building consensus to achieve goals. There were differing views about effective governance. The participants in this study expressed valuing diversity through their deep discussions and examples of the broader concept of social justice.

Valuing diversity was identified as a challenge by the Texas Education Agency. Valuing diversity was a cultural norm, a personal value that went beyond saying. Social justice was the step beyond valuing diversity. Goodman (2011) states that valuing diversity is an appreciation for what others offer to the larger culture. Social justice goes beyond that by including all humans in the larger culture. It was actions that provided equal access, safety, and value for each student, regardless of the student's background.

Social justice was not just a common thread in the data. It was the fabric of their lives. Each participant shared foundational things they had to put into place before they could go about

their work of improving student achievement and closing the achievement gaps. One participant changed policy and the school calendar to ensure all students had equal access opportunities to participate in school activities. Another participant established a mentor program for high school males who were at risk for dropping out of school. Participant Five worked with community groups to provide resources to students in need. Some groups provided food, shelter, and medical care, while others provided tutoring and mentors.

The emerging themes provide model lessons in what successful superintendents do to employ the researched attributes discussed earlier. The most prominent emerging theme was social justice. Each superintendent studied, and gave intriguing and heartwarming examples of ways they have addressed the rights of every student to have equal access to education. They provided linguistically diverse programs, and programs that support students in college preparation curriculum. They ensured the safety of all students and implemented policies that are based on the principles of human rights.

This study identified specific patterns of behaviors, based on the research and confirmed by the participants that support change. There are specific examples of leadership, change and challenge that could provide many leaders with much needed knowledge to support positive changes in their own districts.

The participants confirm the leadership and change attributes are critical in the work of the superintendency. Implications for other superintendents include building these attributes into their plans as they go about their work. Attention to social justice issues must be addressed before real and sustainable increase in student achievement can take place, according to the participants in this study.

### **Implications for Personal Practice**

The implication for personal practice has been particularly rewarding and exciting. This researcher has shared with her leadership team many of the patterns and themes that have been shared in this study. In her current position as assistant superintendent of a high poverty, high minority school system she has a unique opportunity to share her findings with a large leadership group.

One of the most notable implications has been the change in the behavior expectations of the researcher's district to include sexual orientation as part of the non-discrimination definition. Supporting social emotional programs based on the experiences of the participants in this study has been particularly rewarding. The researcher is acutely aware of the vital need for social justice as foundational to educational change.

The researcher was changed in the process of this study. In talking with and studying the participants, the researcher realized how critical social justice issues are and they must be addressed. The participants in this study talked passionately about the social justice issues they address in their districts. The zeal in their voices for leveling the educational "playing field" for all students was inspiring. The researcher also learned that attention to the individual attributes of change and leadership will yield the best results. Social justice issues call for leadership and change. Using the attributes assigned to each is to address social justice will produce the best results.

The researcher analyzed the data to glean the most essential lessons to share with other leaders. Another critical lesson learned from these participants was "never give up". Each participant said that in one way or another. The "never give up" attitude had to do with the work they did on the behalf of students in their districts. The participants' passion for their work in leadership for change began and ended with the needs of their students.



In the process of this study the researcher has had the opportunity to share her findings with superintendents in Kansas. There appears to be a high interest in the successful work of urban female superintendents, who in most cases serve a vastly different population than most superintendents in Kansas.

Finally, there were lessons to be learned about actually conducting research. One realization that came too late for this researcher but may help others is to conduct the interviews through Skype or video conferencing. The non-verbal communication would have enhanced the understanding of the data and provided insights regarding additional probes.

### **Implications for Participants**

The participants in this study were very knowledgeable and confident. As the interview questions were asked, participants often said things like..." I hadn't really thought about it that way." Several participants asked what others had said in response to some of the questions. The researcher believes the participants were reflective and this reflection confirmed the work they were doing. One participant was retiring at the end of June and she mentioned that being interviewed for this study was a nice way to reflect on her years of work. Results will be available for participants providing for potential growth.

### **Recommendations For Further Study**

#### **Recommendation One**

This study investigated the challenges of leadership and change urban female superintendents encounter in their work. The interview questions corresponded to the leadership and change attributes defined by Reeves (2007), Fullan (2009), and Knoster, Villa & Thousand (2000). Given the emergence of social justice issues, it would be advantageous to study what

equal access and human rights issues must be addressed to support the leadership and change attributes already identified.

### **Recommendation Two**

In researching possible participants for this study, the researcher discovered that while the rate of female urban superintendents was on the rise, the progress has been painfully slow. There seems to be more progress since No Child Left Behind was enacted by federal legislators. This law calls for more accountability for student learning. It may be the case that more women have access to the superintendency due to their broad knowledge in curriculum and instruction. A study defining the relationship between a higher rate of female superintendents and NCLB would be fascinating.

### **Recommendation Three**

In the data collection process of this study the researcher learned that of the five women in this study, three were women of color. It would be interesting to understand the relationship between ethnicity and successful urban women superintendents.

### **Recommendation Four**

During the course of this study the researcher discovered that there were some women in the urban superintendency who have a lengthy tenure. Of the five women in this study, four had lengthy careers in the district before being named superintendent. It would be valuable to study the relationship between the tenure of women who are hired from outside the district compared to the tenure of women hired from within the district. It would be helpful to know what factors influence tenure for women superintendents.

### **Recommendation Five**

In the study of these five women, one participant had a Ph.D. It would be useful to understand what role holding a terminal degree plays in the selection of women for the urban superintendency.

### **Recommendation Six**

In the process of this study the researcher wondered if the perspective of male urban superintendents would be the same, similar, or different. It would be informative to identify how male superintendents go about leadership for change as they encounter the same challenges the participants in this study confronted.

### **Recommendation Seven**

Based on the information gathered from the interviews and reviewed various documents each of the participants in this study have much insight to offer. Four of the five participants served in their district before accepting the superintendency. A single case study of any of these participants would yield great information for practitioners.

### **Advice for Future Researchers**

This researcher learned a number of strategies to recruit participants. These strategies were learned through the process of trial and error. To save future researchers time and frustration this researcher offers the following advice.

Once a researcher has determined his/her criteria for participants it is advisable to Google professional organization and associations to find a participant pool. The researcher will likely find KSU faculty or former students who will have a connection to someone within that organization and can make contact with the participant pool for the researcher. Committee members are a wealth of knowledge and are very willing to support the process.

Information sent via the US Post Office is not efficient. Sending an email to possible participants via email in advance of a mailed letter will likely yield more timely results. Email information listed on large districts' websites were not a good connection, typically. It is advisable to make contact with the superintendent's assistant via email or by phone. The superintendent's assistant will be vital to your work. Develop a relationship with that person. Learn their name and the times they are available to talk with you. Always ask for the assistant you've spoken with before. Make sure the assistant know how much you appreciate their help.

If you are unable to contact the superintendent via email, through their assistant or by mail check the district website for a page where you can "ask the superintendent" or "leave a comment for the superintendent". These sites are powerful but not a good first step.

Finally, be aware that many large school districts get many requests from researchers. Many require an approval process through their research department. This process may take up to 10 weeks and has a cost as well as numerous other requirements when the research is completed. It is important to remember if the researcher is passionate about their work others will be more than willing to help you.

### **Summary**

The continuing demands on education to provide higher and higher levels of student learning make excellent leadership for change more essential than ever. The participants in this study provided a rich description of the work they do to bring about sustained change to increase student learning. Their achievements in challenging urban situations are valuable lessons for other leaders. Using the models of leadership and change provided by Reeves, Fullan and others interwoven with the participants' real life examples provided relevant, useful information for others who seek excellence in education.

“Sustainable change depends not upon compliance with external mandates or blind adherence to regulations, but rather upon the pursuit of the greater good” (Reeves, 2009). The women in this study confirm Reeves’ premise. The work they do on a daily basis is nothing short of heroic. They do not just seek change for the sake of change. They serve all students who attend their schools every day. This study provides the reader with a snapshot into their daily work.

This experience has fundamentally changed the focus and intentions of the researcher in terms of her own work to create high level of learning in her district. This study has made the work of leadership and change real in terms of having tangible examples to follow. The researcher will be forever grateful to the outstanding women who were willing to share their experiences. It is the hope of this researcher that others will glean valuable information from this work. The following quote best exemplifies the five women who participated in this study.

*Bearing yet not possessing  
Working yet not taking credit  
Leading yet not dominating  
This is a Primal Virtue.*

Lao-Tzu

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#### **APPENDIX A: Invitation to Participate**

Date

Name

Title

Institution

Address

Dear

Congratulations on your ongoing successful work in the superintendency. Your work is important to urban districts that face so many challenges in terms of improving student achievement. Because of your effectiveness, you have been nominated to participate in a study about the challenges women urban superintendents face, by board member Winston Brooks from the Council of Great City Schools.

I am conducting this study for my doctoral dissertation at Kansas State University. The study's focus is aimed at women who currently serve as superintendents in large urban school districts who are members of the Council of Great City Schools. There are few studies at this time that capitalize on female urban superintendents who are great leaders. This qualitative study will target the challenges of change, leadership, and gender issues women encounter in their role as an urban superintendent.

Given the qualitative nature of this study, participants will be asked to complete two 20-minute interviews conducted by telephone with follow-up conversations via email and finally a member check for accuracy. The member checks will consist of reviewing your findings from the data analysis. The participants are asked to provide a professional vita and a biography will be collected from reliable online sources for the study.

If you are willing to share your experiences for others to be better informed about the female superintendent, please complete the short questionnaire attached to this email and return no later than {DATE}. Only a very few have been nominated and your participation is very important to this investigation.

I would like to thank you for your time and consideration of participation in this study. It is my belief that your experiences will add to the body of research on women superintendents and thereby inspire others to pursue higher levels of leadership with a greater sense of confidence. I also believe that the reflective nature of the semi-structured interviews and member checks will provide you with the opportunity to systematically reflect on your contributions and how they have impacted others. I look forward to hearing from you.

I will identify your district only by size and by general region of the country (e.g. a district of 40,000 in the southeast). I will assign a pseudonym to protect your identity. Each interview will be recorded and the recordings will be locked in a file for a period of 3 years, and then destroyed.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Stroh

Doctoral Candidate

Kansas State University

Enclosures

## **APPENDIX B: Intent to Participate Form**

### Identification and Background Information

Multi-Case Study of Five Female Urban Superintendents: Perceptions of Leadership, Change, and Challenges

The following questions are general information that will be used to confirm that you meet the criteria for this study. Please complete this form and email it back to me by {DATE}

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_
2. School District Name \_\_\_\_\_
3. Position Title \_\_\_\_\_
4. Telephone Number \_\_\_\_\_
5. Email Address \_\_\_\_\_
6. How Long Have You Been Employed In This Position \_\_\_\_\_ Years
7. Has Student Achievement Increased During Your Tenure \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No
8. If Yes, By What Percentage Points Overall Per Year \_\_\_\_\_ %
9. If You Meet The Criteria, Would You Be Willing To:

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in 2 Twenty Minute Telephone Interviews
- \_\_\_\_\_ Respond to Email Follow-up Questions
- \_\_\_\_\_ React to Findings from the Data Analysis
- Date for 1<sup>st</sup> Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m. or p.m.)
- Date for 2<sup>nd</sup> Interview \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m. or p.m.)

THANK YOU!

**APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form**

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT TEMPLATE

PROJECT TITLE: A Multi-Case Study of the Perceptions of Selected Urban Women Superintendents About Change and Leadership

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT:

EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Dr. Trudy Salsberry, PI  
Jeanne Stroh, Co-PI

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: 785.532.7801 [tas@ksu.edu](mailto:tas@ksu.edu)  
785.844.1874 [strohj@usd308.com](mailto:strohj@usd308.com)

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: 

- Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

SPONSOR OF PROJECT: None

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this research is to identify common experiences of women urban superintendents.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: This study will consist of two semi structured telephone interviews with the participants. The telephone interviews will be tape recorded. Transcripts from the tape recordings will be kept. I will also collect a vita and biography from each of the participants. Participants will be able to review and correct transcribed interviews. Email will be used for clarification and member-checks with respect to findings.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:  
NONE

None

LENGTH OF STUDY: Two, 20-30 minute tape recorded telephone interviews, for a total of 40-60 minutes for each participant. A vita and biography will be collected about each participant.

RISKS ANTICIPATED: None

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Identifying common experiences in urban women superintendents may support research in leadership and the change process. Through the interview process participants may find it helpful to reflect on their practices. Little information currently exists in the literature about the role of female urban superintendents.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Interviews will be coded and identified with the assigned pseudonym. Tape recordings and transcripts will be locked in a file. Urban school districts will not be identify by name, only by general region (an urban school district in the southwest, for example).

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: Not Applicable

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: Not Applicable

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.**

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.



**(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant)**

**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Witness to Signature: (project staff)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX D: Interview Guide**

The researcher will ask each participant to respond to the following open-ended questions as thoughtfully and completely as possible. The researcher may need to ask additional questions for

clarification and details. The open-ended questions are designed to allow participants to add relevant information which has not been anticipated by the interviewer. Additionally, the interviewer will allow ample time for participants to respond completely to the questions. Follow-up interviews to thoroughly capture responses and details may be necessary.

### Research Sub Questions

1. *What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' practices from a transformational leadership perspective?*
2. *What common patterns exist in the perceptions of the participants' practices in the use of change theory to improving student achievement?*
3. *What common patterns exist in the perceptions of challenges participants encounter as they navigate the urban superintendency, and how do they manage these challenges?*

### Interview Questions Session 1

1. What interested you in the superintendency?
2. What skills do you have that serve you best in your position?
3. What experiences have you had that most influence your leadership for change?

**Leadership:** We describe leadership as commitment and persistence to moving everyone in the same direction until goals are reached. Leadership includes reciprocity, or creating leaders within the system by building relationships so that others can use their expertise to sustain the momentum towards the goals (Reeves, 2007).

1. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
2. How do you access the expertise of others?
3. Are there different leadership strategies you use with your board than those you use with staff? What are those strategies?
4. Describe your vision for the district.
5. How do you lead to ensure the vision for this district is realized?
6. How do you measure your success in moving towards the district vision?
7. How have you built relationships with staff; central office leadership team; principals; teachers; others?
8. How have you built relationships within the community?
9. What is your primary method/methods of communication with; the board; leadership team; teaching staff; the community?
10. How do you make decisions? Who is involved?
11. How do you sharpen your leadership skills?

12. How do you build leadership capacity in others?

**Change:** We define change as new beliefs; a new understanding; a new set of behaviors/practices; and new materials.

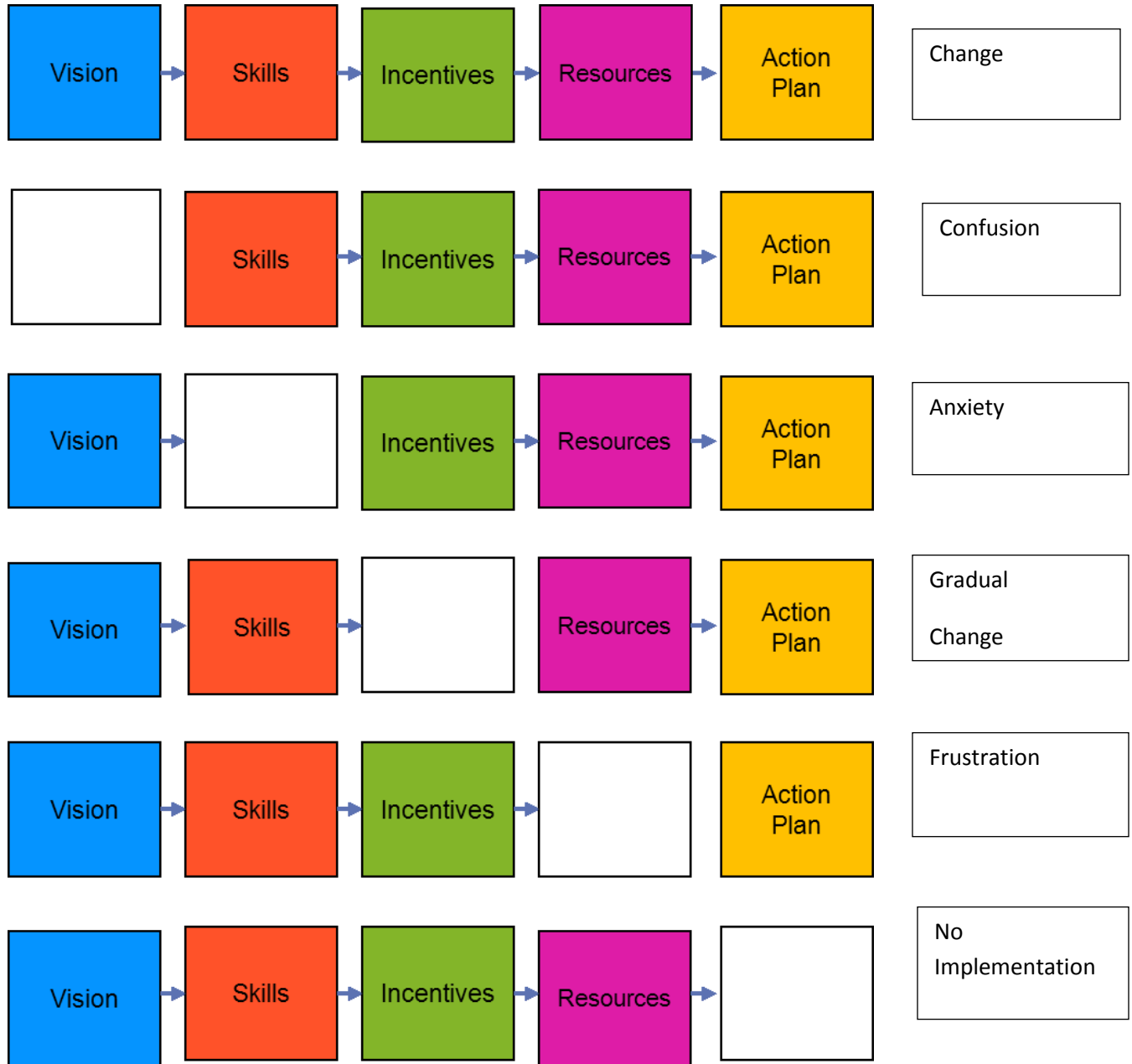
1. Given our definition, what are the biggest changes you have undertaken since you arrived in the superintendent's office?
2. What is the role of vision in the change process?
3. How did you keep the vision at the forefront?
4. What is the role of skills in the change process?
5. What skills were needed and how did you develop those skills in your staff?
6. Did you provide incentives to influence change?
7. What incentives were used?
8. What resources did you have to provide?
9. What role did the right resources play in the change process?
10. Describe your action plan to bring about change?
11. What advice about change would you share with others?
12. Given our definition, in your view, how does change intersect with leadership to create significant growth student achievement?

### **Interview Questions Session 2**

1. As you reflect on your work as superintendent, what is it about your work that you find most rewarding?
2. Most challenging?
3. What would you most like women aspiring to the superintendency to know?
4. What advice would you give others in the superintendency?
5. Is there anything you would like to add context for the work you do with regards to leadership and change for growth in student achievement?

## **APPENDIX E: Managing Change**

MANAGING CHANGE



Adapted from Knoster, T., Villa R., & Thousand, J. (2000). *A framework for thinking about systems change*. Baltimore, MD. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.